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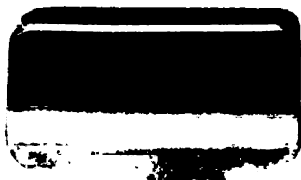
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BELIEVING  
YEARS

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**THE BELIEVING YEARS**



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TORONTO

# THE BELIEVING YEARS

BY

EDMUND LESTER PEARSON

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New York

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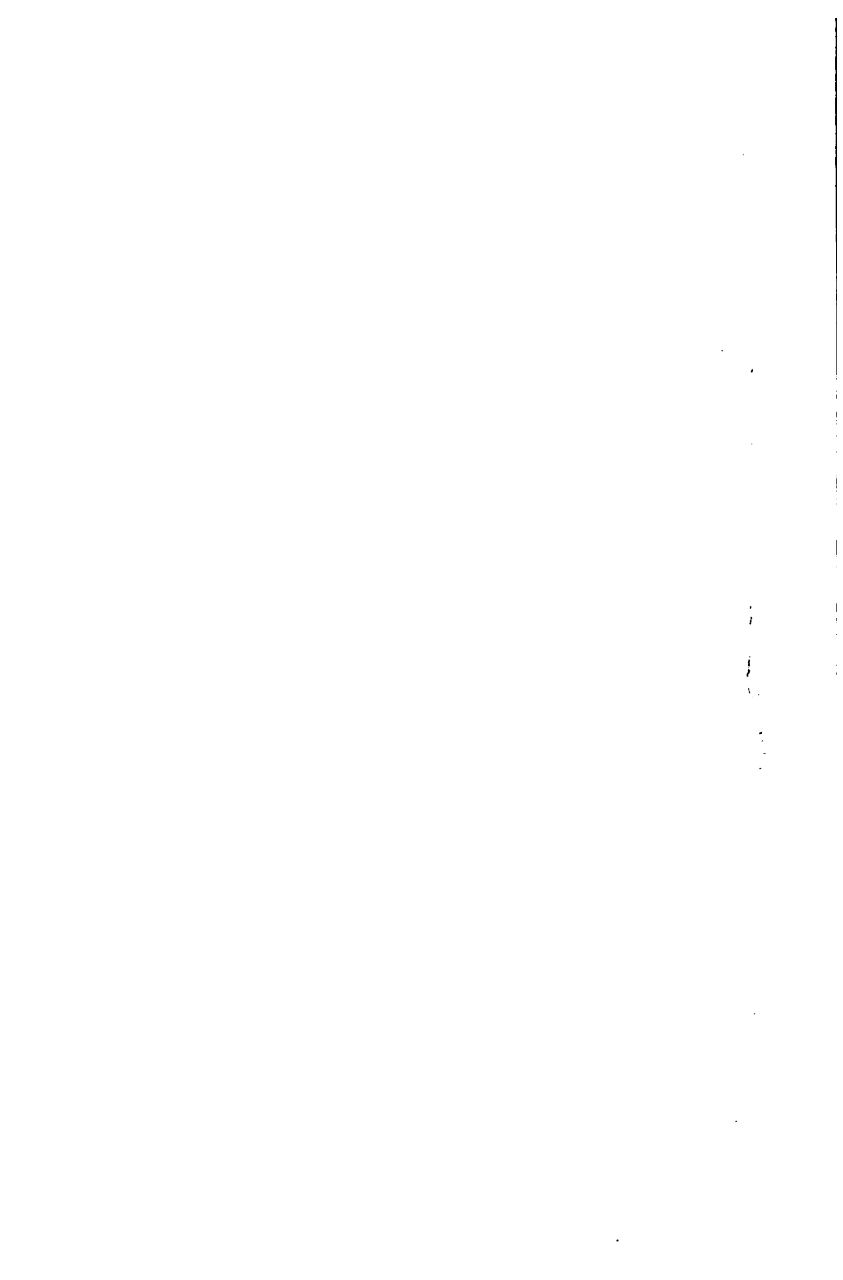
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To  
EDMUND CARLTON PEARSON  
(1841-1897)

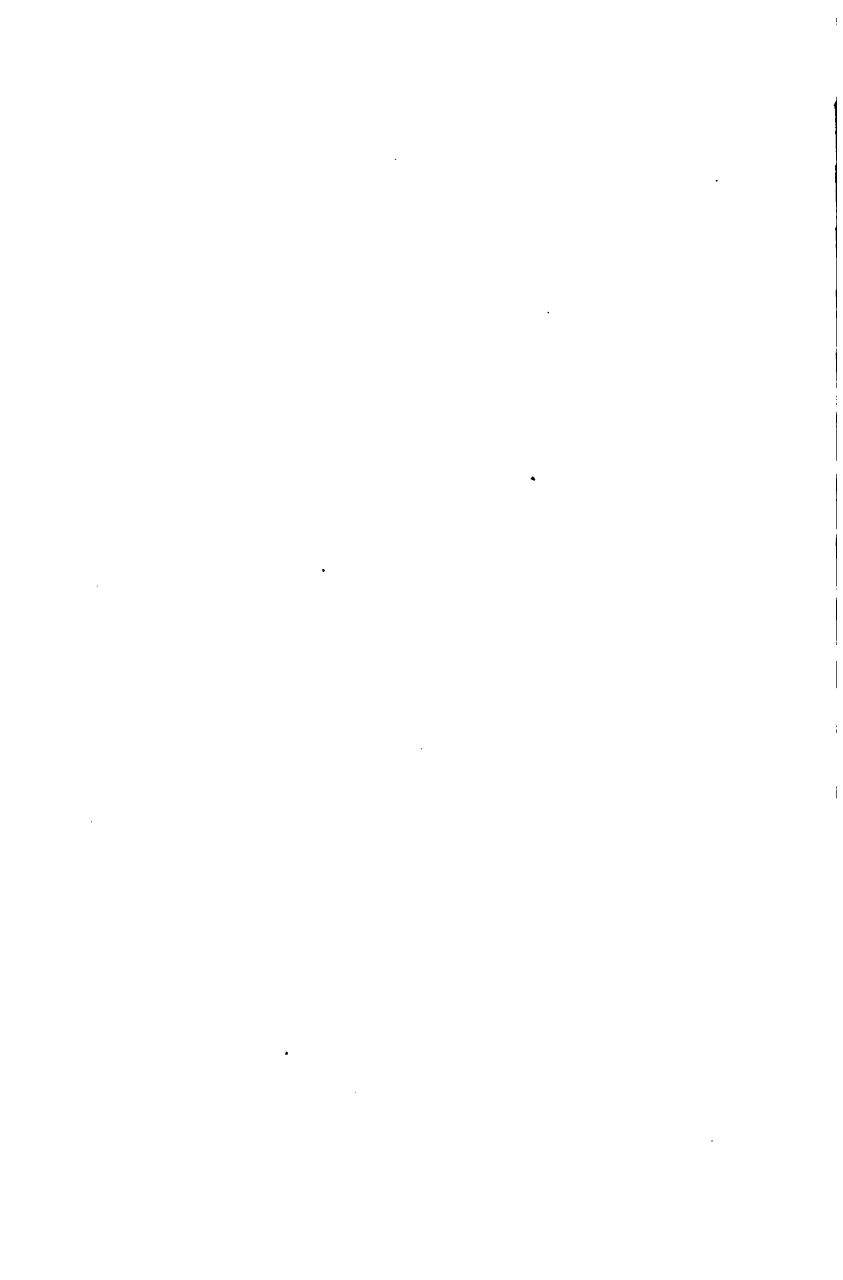
“E’en as he trod that day to God so walked he from his  
birth,  
In simpleness and gentleness and honor and clean  
mirth.”



## NOTE

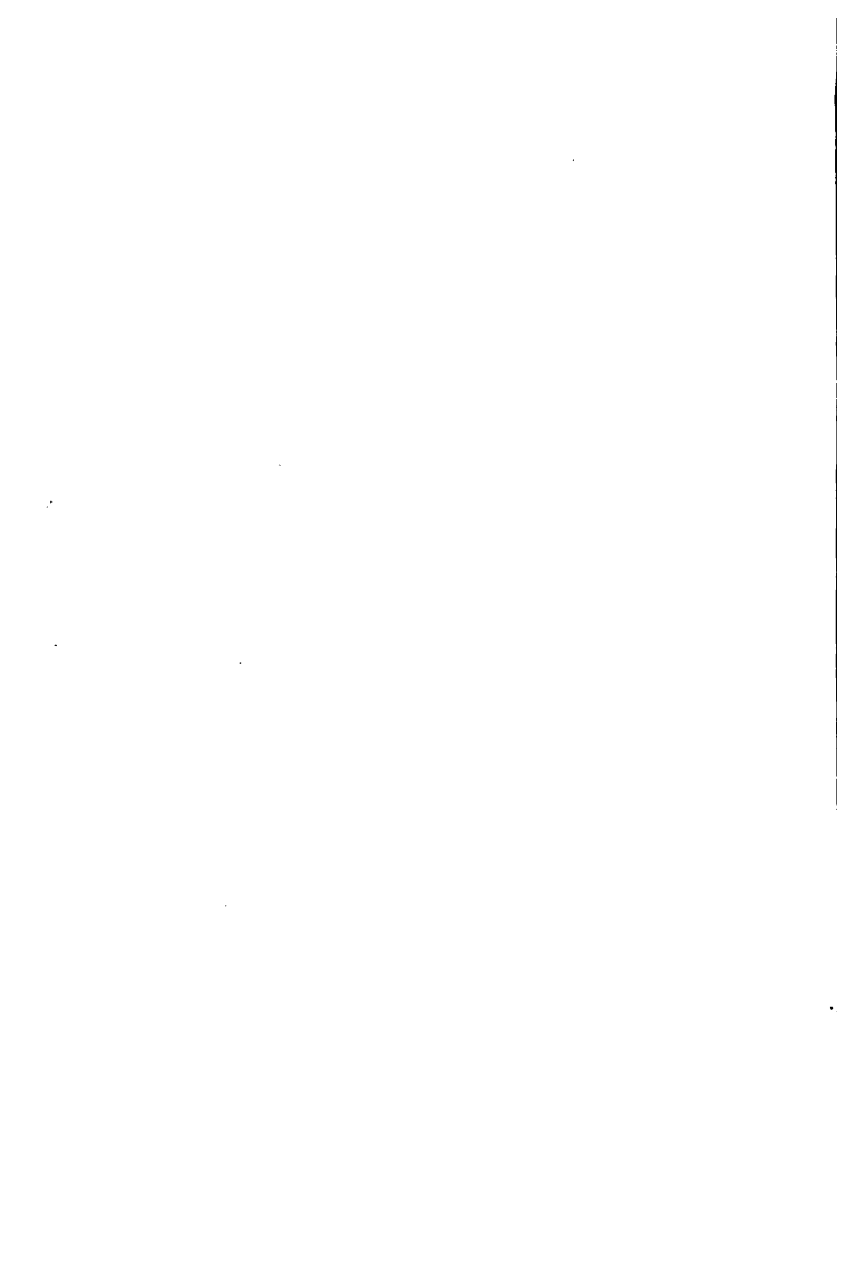
A NUMBER of the incidents described in this book have been used in a series of stories published in *The Outlook*. To The Outlook Company my thanks are due for their courteous permission to retell these stories in an altered form.

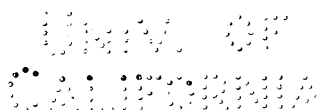
E. L. P.



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# THE BELIEVING YEARS

## CHAPTER I

MR. COLBURN

EACH boy in the school-room had fixed his mind on two objects: the calendar and the clock. On the former stood out in big black characters

**June**  
**20**

The clock pointed to the hour of three. Exactly sixty minutes separated us from vacation. It was the day of our dreams, — the last day of school.

We had thought of it, thought of it far back when snow still covered the ground; planned for it, lived in hope of it. Tomorrow the tyrannical bell should be



silent, and no one could say: "Time to start for school!"

Many forces had been at work hurrying this day forward: the first blades of grass, the first leaves on the horse-chestnut trees, the first robin who ran across the grass-plots overlooking the frog pond, the first dandelion that gleamed in the grass. All were signs and symbols of it.

But in spite of so many omens, the day itself had been outrageously slow to arrive. The robins had abated the enthusiasm of the first few weeks, and become quieter. They were sober householders and family men, now. The golden blossoms of the dandelions were transformed into that shape in which they are useful chiefly to blow upon three times to see at what o'clock your mother wants you. The season had arrived for swimming, — indeed, it had been here for weeks, — Ed Mason and Rob Currier claimed to

have gone in swimming at Four Rocks as early as the last day of April. The fish in Little River needed our careful attention. And in front of Austin's shop had long stood a sign displaying a pink pyramid with a spoon stuck therein, and the seductive words "Ice Cream," a spectacle that made our Fourth of July money stir uneasily in our pockets.

In short, all the elements of vacation were here, — all but the thing itself. Each morning the summons came at twenty minutes of nine, and each morning we trod the dismal path. Pencils squeaked, and slaty smells arose as the slates were covered with figures and then cleaned with damp sponges. The pungent odor of cedar, from newly sharpened lead-pencils, mingled with the fragrance of pickled limes, — smuggled into school and eaten contrary to the orders of Miss Temple, the teacher. Outside, summer

called us in a dozen different ways. And, uneasy prisoners, we chafed and wriggled in our seats.

But, somehow, the days had dragged by, and even this final one had nearly gone. At the last moment, when our release was so near at hand, a dismal spectre arose before us to block the way. It was the forbidding form of Mr. Colburn.

This was a man who had written an arithmetic, — an arithmetic of singular and diabolical ingenuity. He had done this thing long before any of us were born, and then he had passed from the earth. But his work had remained to annoy us. Occasionally, during the last hour of the afternoon session, we wrestled with Mr. Colburn, by request. This was in addition to the regular arithmetic lesson in the morning.

I conceived Mr. Colburn as a tall,

spare man, clad in brown leather. His face was brown and leathery, too, and it was puckered and sour. In one hand he held his famous book, — in the other, a big switch. He was full of impertinent curiosity, was Mr. Colburn, and he had no manner of interest in the things that really concerned us.

I wanted to know if Ed Mason (whose seat was next but one behind mine) were going fishing to-morrow morning. Mr. Colburn wanted to know if 3 fifths of a chaldron of coal cost 8 dollars, what is the whole chaldron worth?

I did not care what it was worth, I did not know what a chaldron was, anyway, — and I have never found out. But I saw we were in for an uncomfortable hour as soon as Miss Temple said:

“Take your Colburn’s Arithmetics and sit up straight in your seats. . . . Robert, did you throw that? Well, you may go

and stand in that corner, with your face to the wall."

Rob Currier did as he was directed with undisguised delight. By one skilful stroke he had put himself beyond the clutch of Mr. Colburn. The rest of us looked upon him with envy, — if we had only been so inspired!

It was base of Miss Temple to devote the last hour of school to Colburn's Arithmetic. We thought regretfully of another teacher we had once had. She would have read to us the adventures of "The Prince and the Pauper," and that was altogether better than fretting us about the price of coal. Never in my life have I wished to know the worth of a chaldron of coal, but if ever I have such a wish doubtless the dealer will tell me straight out.

But that was not the way with the people Mr. Colburn knew, — they could

never give you a decent answer about anything. If you asked one of Mr. Colburn's friends the price of his horse, he would reply that the horse and the saddle together were worth 100 dollars, but the horse was worth 9 times as much as the saddle, — and that was all you could get out of him.

For my part, I privately resolved never to buy horses of any such disagreeable folk, — a resolution which I have faithfully kept.

Miss Temple must have observed my anxiety to speak with Ed Mason, for she promptly called upon me:—

“Samuel, you may take Question 61. Read it.”

“ ‘A man bought 1 ton and 4 fifths of a ton of fustic for 43 dollars, what was that a ton ? ’ ”

I struggled with it for a few moments, vaguely wondering what fustic might be,

but in the end I was compelled to say that I did not know. Jimmy Toppan and Charley Carter both fell victims to the question. It was finally answered, with some help from Miss Temple, by Joe Carter. The answer did not seem very interesting to us, after it had been found and worked out on the blackboard.

We were watching the clock.

Mr. Colburn would not have cared for clocks, — unless, indeed, he could have made up some hateful question about them. He did not care for our fishing trips; he had no interest in the frog pond and its creatures. The warm, summer day outside had no attraction for him.

He wanted to know if cloth 4 quarters wide is worth 8 dollars a yard, what is 1 yard of the same kind of cloth, that is 5 quarters wide, worth? And his conspirator, Miss Temple, aided and abetted him in his curiosity. She fired the questions

at us with unremitting vigor. We were called upon to reduce  $9\frac{4}{7}$  to an improper fraction, though how any one could wish to inject into it any more impropriety than it already seemed to possess, was a matter impossible to understand.

The long hour wore on. From outside came the drone of insects. A flock of sheep passed the school, — driven up Elm Street by men who were probably hurrying them to their fate. We tried to look out the windows and watch the progress of the sheep, but we were recalled by Miss Temple, to whom the incident suggested nothing except a chance to try upon us what Mr. Colburn seems to have considered his crowning effort.

“A man driving his geese to market was met by another, who said, Good morrow, master, with your hundred geese; says he, I have not a hundred; but if I had half as many more as I now have,



and two geese and a half, I should have a hundred; how many had he?"

Disheartening as this problem appeared, together with its inhuman suggestion of a man carrying half of a goose about with him, it nevertheless proved useful to us. Joe Carter and one or two others (who affected to enjoy Mr. Colburn) engaged in a long wrangle with each other and with Miss Temple, about the number of geese owned by this palpable lunatic. We regarded them, at first, with a pity not unmixed with loathing; then, as we observed how they were taking up the time, we came to appreciate the value of the discussion. Ed Mason and Jimmy Toppan, from the depths of a complete ignorance of the subject, managed to interject one or two inquiries that had the happy result of tangling every one up still worse, and thus prolonging the goose argument.

To our great joy the problem was still unsolved at five minutes of four. Then Miss Temple was forced to bid us close the books. She made a few perfunctory remarks, wished us a pleasant vacation, and, when a gong sounded throughout the building, dismissed the class.

We filed to get our hats, filed downstairs, through the hall, and out the door with a concerted and enthusiastic yell. Mr. Colburn and imprisonment lay behind us; ahead were vacation and freedom. So we whooped once more, and again, until a scissors-grinder, who had gone to sleep on the grass under a tree, woke up with a start. The old horse who drew Oliver's bakery wagon had been standing sleepily in front of a house on the other side of Elm Street. At our third shout he ambled clumsily off, while Mr. Oliver, with a basket of buns in his hand, pursued him down the street.

## CHAPTER II

### THE OLD TOWN

ELM STREET, into which we rushed that afternoon, was a broad thoroughfare extending from one end of the town to the other. On both sides it was lined with trees, set at the edge of the brick sidewalks. Mainly fine tall elms, they lent a distinction to the street and made it notable among those which characterize the older towns of New England. In the opinion of all the citizens, Elm Street was beyond comparison.

Local pride did not exaggerate. Its unusual length, its great, graceful trees and the dignified houses, made the street undoubtedly beautiful. There were houses of every style which has been in

vogue during two hundred years. Roofs which sloped in the rear nearly to the ground, gambrel roofs, and the various less attractive fashions of the nineteenth century, — all were there.

But those of which the owners were most proud, those best suited to the street, were the great, square, three-storied houses, built in the early years of the century. That was the time of the town's prosperity, before a fire had checked its growth, before shifting sands had almost closed its harbor. Ships from the old town sailed every ocean then, and carried our flag into strange, foreign ports. Their captains, or their owners, built many of the big, square houses, so you could often see, on the roof, a little railed platform, where the householder might stand of a morning to sweep the harbor and the ocean with his spy-glass. Charley Carter's father did this regu-

larly, although the ships in which he was interested sailed to this port no longer, if, indeed, they sailed at all.

The town was built along one bank of the river, and Elm Street followed the crest of the slope. It was an easy thing, therefore, for any one standing on the roof of one of the houses to get a good view of the river, the salt marshes, the sand-dunes, and the ocean. The ocean spread out there, bright and clear, from the dim blue mountain that rose on the far horizon in Maine, to the low hills of Cape Ann. Sometimes, at night, the east wind brought the rumble of breakers, or the booming sound of a whistling buoy that guarded the harbor.

The town was long and very narrow. From Elm Street you could look down some of the cross streets to the river, and beyond. On the other side of Elm Street, as soon as you had passed the gardens

that lay behind the big houses, you were almost in open country. There were a few outlying farms, a few shanties, and then bare, scrubby fields, the Common Pasture, rocky knolls and clumps of woods. On one of these farms dwelt Mr. Diggery, — a fierce little man, of whom we went in terror.

So near did the river come to the lower part of the town that a storm often made people who lived in that quarter need high boots to get across the street; while the country (unexplored wilds to us!) closed up so near on the other side of Elm Street, that owls, woodchucks, and an occasional fox penetrated the gardens.

It was this nearness of the river and ocean, and of the open country, that made the town such a delightful dwelling-place for us. Even the centre of the town, the neighborhood where Ed Mason and Jimmy Toppan lived, and Rob Currier,

the two Carters, Horace Winslow, Peter Bailey, and I, — this was a region thick with the possibilities of adventure. Much of this centred about the frog pond and the Mall. The pond was full of goldfish, and other humbler fish, and toads, frogs, and water-beetles. You were sure to find something interesting whenever you walked around the pond. Many of our neighbors on Elm Street owned large gardens, to which we had entrance — either by permission, or by the informal and far more adventurous method of climbing the back fence.

The owners of the gardens, at that period, were mostly elderly persons, dwelling in great contentment and the most profound quiet. Their lives were comfortable, well-ordered, and precise. They lived mainly in the past. They pondered much on some grandfather, or great-grandfather, who had built up a

fortune through foreign trade, and they heeded not at all the remarks of envious and ill-natured folk who liked to point out that one of the chief commodities of this trade was rum. The principal hallmark of their respectability was a portrait of their ancestor, with very pink cheeks, — the sign of an outdoor life, and not necessarily an indication of a taste for port and madeira.

Beside this venerable portrait would hang a lively representation of the ship *Sally B.*, as she appeared on some memorable occasion entering the harbor of Singapore, and viewed by one of those artists who invariably happen to be near by when the ship is under full sail and making not less than twelve knots.

It was a period not so very far removed from our own time, and yet different from it in a number of respects. No thumping, grinding trolley car disturbed the



quiet of Elm Street that bright June afternoon. Infrequently, an omnibus rambled up and down. By night the darkness was punctuated here and there by a gas flame at the top of an iron lamp post. Rob Currier's big brother Dick had the proud privilege of going about our neighborhood at sunset, with a ladder and a supply of matches, to set these lamps alight. We used to watch him, and wonder if we should ever get old enough and sufficiently influential to occupy a public position like his. But before we reached the required age and dignity the old lamp-posts had been taken down in favor of electric lights.

No one had his letters brought to his house. If he wanted his mail, or wished to send a letter, he went to the post-office. The nine o'clock parade of citizens making toward that building was one of the regular features of life in the town.

At nine in the evening a church bell rang the curfew, — although it had absolutely no significance. It had always been done: that was reason sufficient for an old and conservative place. When the ringer died, or something else happened to stop its mournful sound, a well-to-do citizen quickly provided funds to continue the ringing. The curfew laws, with their reference to children, had not come into vogue, so the bell sounded each evening simply out of regard for an old custom. Few heard it, and to few of these did it make the slightest difference.

We did not often hear foreign tongues or see foreign faces on the streets. Once in a while we might overhear two old women, with shawls over their heads, conversing in Irish as they passed along. The Mediterranean peoples had not arrived, — although they had sent a pioneer in the person of Mr. Mazzone, who pre-

sided over a little stand at the foot of Main Street, and was an important personage to us, because of the peanuts which he sold.

The boys who went to the parochial school, the Pats and Mikes, were a kind of hostile crew, and when we met it was usually with an exchange of horse-chestnuts or snowballs. This was because of no racial or religious animosity, — we were simply two rival gangs, that was all. On one occasion, when Ed Mason and I met a number of the parochial school boys out in the country, there was an exchange of epithets that stopped (as such meetings did not always stop) this side of blows. I was reduced to a state of almost tearful indignation when one of the little Irish boys asserted that I was “a Protestant.”

I denied the charge vehemently, but when I got home and repeated the insult,

I learned that it was only too true. I had never suspected it, and had gone on thinking that I was merely a Unitarian. Alas, it seemed that I was a Protestant as well.

The charm and quaintness of the past had by no means vanished from the old town. Wooden ships were still built on the river, now and then, and the sea-captains gathered and gossiped in the rooms of the Marine Society. Overhead was a museum of curiosities of the deep, and of foreign lands. Some one of the captains would always be willing to unlock the room for us, and let us inspect the dusty albatross, the dried flying-fishes, the little ships in bottles, and all the other objects of interest.

One grocery still displayed the sign "E. & W. I. Goods," and more than one citizen walked the streets in a beaver hat. There was old fat Captain Millett,

who tacked down Main Street every morning in summer under an enormous green-lined umbrella, big enough to shelter a family. There was Captain Bannister, who lived alone in his curious little house on West Injy Lane, where he cultivated a garden patch of cinnamon pinks. And there was Mr. Babbitt, the Quaker gentleman, who used to pass with stately tread, as we played on Elm Street, or about the pond. He was tall and dignified, and he wore a high hat and a frock coat, — I had almost said a surtout, — with a shirt collar so high and antiquated that he seemed to belong to [the time of Martin Van Buren. He kept on his black velvet ear-caps until summer was well advanced, and he put them on again the first of September. But he was the friend of a great poet, and every one respected him for that, as well as for his own character.

There was still a town crier, — one of the last, or, as he claimed, the very last one in this country. “Squawboo” (as we were told we must not call him), or Mr. Landford (as we were told we ought to call him), walked the streets with a large dinner bell. He would pause at intervals, and ring his bell vigorously. Then, throwing back his head, he would emit a volume of sound which would strike the hearer with astonishment. I have seen strangers paralyzed with amazement as they heard for the first time, and unexpectedly, the deep, tremendous tones that issued from his throat.

“Hear — what — I — have — to — say!” he would begin. “Grand — dance — at — City — Hall — to-morrow — evening — at — eight — o’clock. — Admission — fifty — cents — ladies free! — COME, ONE — COME, *EVERY-BODY!!*”

And then he would ring the bell again, and walk on.

I have stopped, for the most of this chapter, to explain what kind of a town it was in which we passed the believing years, the years which began with us, and continued for a dozen summers or so. But now, if you please, we will return to that afternoon when we dashed out of school, and left Mr. Colburn and Miss Temple behind. We ran into a land of wonder. The first thing for me to learn about was that fishing trip for to-morrow.

I hastily consulted Ed Mason about it. No; we could not go, it must be postponed. Parts of the necessary tackle were missing, and there were reasons, connected with the approaching Fourth of July, why neither of us desired to make any avoidable expenditures just then.

But there was another plan, into which I might be admitted, — if I could prove trustworthy.

"You won't tell?" queried Ed Mason.

"Course not!"

"Cross your heart?"

I crossed my heart and hoped I might die.

But I could not know just then, — I must wait until next morning.

It was fearful discipline for the soul, but I survived until after breakfast the next day. Then I presented myself at the Masons' side yard, — their house was within stone's throw of ours.

Ed had, so I understood, some mysterious recipe, — some ceremony to perform that was not only extraordinary in itself, but it was to be rewarded in the most fascinating manner imaginable.

He came out of the house with a serious face, led me down behind an apple tree, and there, after looking carefully about for eavesdroppers, unfolded the cryptic plot.



## CHAPTER III

### MAGIC

You took' rose-leaves — fresh rose-leaves — and mixed them with brown sugar. Then you wrapped them in a leaf from a grape-vine, and buried the whole business in the ground. You let them stay for three days. At the end of that time you dug them up and ate them ; ate them with rapture known only to those who have eaten this particular delicacy. For to the natural fragrance of the rose-leaves and the nourishing and delicious properties of brown sugar, that interval of three days in the warm earth had added a new quality. A mysterious alchemy had been at work and transformed the mixture into something ex-

quisite — a dish to be envied by great kings and sultans. It had about it odors of the East; savors of Araby the blest.

So said Ed Mason's older brother, Billy. And he was nearly thirteen. He did not use all the words which I have used to describe the taste of the rose-leaf compound. He had merely said it was "bully." That was enough for us — that, and the charm of the operation itself. He had tried it many times in the far-off days of his youth; and now we set out to make some for ourselves.

The rose-leaves were easy to get. We had only to climb over the fence and we were in Auntie Merrill's garden. Auntie Merrill was old, and she seldom came into the garden. She had no one with whom to share it; and the roses budded, bloomed, and dropped their petals unheeded to the path. From this path we gathered some; but it is likely that others

were induced, with little effort, to leave the full-blown flowers a day or two in advance of their natural fall.

Roses are beautiful things, even to boys of eight or nine, but æsthetic considerations must give way before the stern, practical demands of life.

We debated whether red or yellow roses were most likely to give good results. At last we decided to combine the two colors, and a tempting mixture they made. We put the leaves in my hat, and climbed the fence again into the Masons' back yard.

The next ingredient was brown sugar. Here, again, the matter was simple. A barrel of the pleasing substance lived in a certain dim passage leading from Ed Mason's mother's pantry. It was dark, moist, and a joy forever. It had the crawly habit peculiar to brown sugar, and it came away (when questing hands were

plunged into the barrel) in lumps that filled the mouth and turned the cares of life to vanity and unimportance. With it, during hard days, we frequently restored our wasted tissues.

The rose-leaves were left to themselves while we made a reconnaissance in force toward the place of the sugar barrel. The enemy (one Nora Sullivan, a desperate character) was reported as engaged in washing dishes in the kitchen. She neglected to station any outposts, so her carelessness was our advantage.

We made the customary investigation for a large gray rat — supposed, since a time to which the mind of man runneth not back, to dwell behind the barrel. As usual, he was found missing.

We seized the sugar and retired in discretion and stickiness to the yard. There we mixed the rose-leaves and the sugar. From the vine that grew on the

side of the woodshed we picked a large leaf. This was the vine that furnished leaves to be worn inside our hats to prevent sunstroke on hot days.

No one knows how many sunstrokes we escaped by means of those grape leaves.

We wrapped the red and yellow petals, well covered with sugar, in the grape leaf, and secured it with straws and blades of grass. No creeping worm nor brisk beetle was to partake of this food of the gods.

Next came the rite of burial. There was no doubt that the leaf and its contents must be buried in Auntie Merrill's garden. That was the scene of all mysteries, and the only place where our caché would be reasonably secure from Ed Mason's sister Louise and her friend Jessie Plummer. These were high matters, too great for the feminine intellect. Also, of course,

we had Auntie Merrill to consider. A place must be discovered where she would not come poking around.

"Back of the lilies-of-the-valley," said Ed Mason.

"It's kind of wet there," I objected.

"What difference does that make?"

"Well, it might not work there. I tell you: let's put 'em in the corner, near Hawkins' shed."

"No; I want 'em back of the lilies-of-the-valley. It's my mother's brown sugar, and Billy told me how to do it. You wouldn't know anything 'bout it if I hadn't told you!"

I succumbed to the force of this argument, and we began to excavate back of the lily bed. With shingles (procured from men who were shingling Dr. Macey's barn) we dug the pit and covered the grape leaf with earth. Then, after driving away a prowling cat (who probably

recollected funeral services performed over deceased robins in that very garden), we climbed the fence once more and set out to endure the weary interval of three days.

It was Saturday morning, and ten o'clock. Not until Tuesday at the same hour could we unearth the treasure.

Billy had said so.

Three days were required, no more and no less. At the end of that time, to the minute, the magic forces that dwelt in the earth would have effected the change, and what we buried as simple brown sugar and the petals of roses would come forth in a new form — a form to make epicures sigh with content.

We walked up the yard, by the woodshed, past the apple tree and the clothes-jack, and out to the street. But something had happened. A thick black cloud had descended and covered us. A few

minutes before, the sun was shining gloriously, and we stood on the mountain peak of action and expectancy. Now it had all come to an end; the rose-leaves were buried, and before us in all their hideous length and tediousness stretched those three days.

Three days !

Three years rather ! The face of the heavens was darkened and we wandered in gloom. We made an effort of cheerfulness and started for the pond with a view to catching Lucky-bugs. But we abandoned this almost immediately, and decided to hunt up Jimmy Toppan, who lived next door. Then we remembered that Jimmy had gone to his grandmother's farm in the country for the whole day. By this time the pall that overhung us had become deeper and more insufferable.

We turned the corner of the street and gazed drearily at Dr. Macey's barn and



the men at work on its roof. The old shingles were coming down with a clatter, and the odor of the new ones filled the air.

Perhaps there was hope in shingles !

We remembered that it takes but few strokes of a jack-knife, a little cutting and boring, to convert a shingle into a boat. It only needs pointing at the bows and rounding at the stern, the insertion of a mast and the fitting of a paper sail — half an old envelope will do. The boats thus fashioned would sail half across the pond — until stuck in the lily-pads.

We chose two shingles and began to whittle. But there was no salt in it. Our minds wandered, and after a few moments Ed dropped his shingle, closed his knife, and put it in his pocket.

“I’m goin’ into the barn an’ look for mice,” he announced.

About the chutes which let grain into

the stalls, mice were known to linger. Once I had caught one in my hands, a feat which I instantly regretted, for the mouse bit my finger and made his escape in short order. Since that time the pursuit of the common drab mouse had been considered a pastime not without the charm of danger and the risk of bloodshed. But now the mention of mice only brought my thoughts back — as if they needed bringing! — to the subject that possessed us both.

“Do you think you drove that old cat away?” I asked abruptly.

Ed understood immediately; I did not need to specify the cat.

“I dunno,” he said; “she may be foolin’ round now. P’r’aps we ought to go and see.”

“Let’s,” I replied quickly.

We crossed the street, cut across the Toppans’ back yard, and then, by a cer-

tain fence route, well understood and prescribed for all important occasions, entered Auntie Merrill's garden.

A cat slunk off between the box hedges, and a robin flew hurriedly from the fence to the apple tree where he had his nest of mud and dried grass. He uttered three or four excited notes as he flew.

The sunlight of a morning in late June fell in patches on the paths, the hedges, and the flower beds. The rose-bushes dropped their petals, and the syringa moved in the breeze.

That was a garden !

It had old-fashioned flowers — snapdragons, portulacas (now in full blaze in the sun), and hollyhocks — in the days before old-fashioned flowers became new-fashioned again. Orioles hunted their food in the fruit trees to carry it back to their hanging nests in the elms that shaded the street near by. It was firefly-

haunted at night, and we used to run up and down the paths and try to catch the fireflies in our hats. It was full of long, mysterious vistas, overgrown shrubs breaking in on the paths, and valuable hiding-places. Plums grew there, and pears and cherries and peaches.

When, on rare occasions, Auntie Merrill walked slowly down the path, she appeared to be totally unaware that Indians, highway robbers, pirates, cowboys, spies, scouts, and other ruffians were dogging her footsteps from bush to bush. We always thought it best to keep an eye on her.

It is a perfectly safe place to-day. Auntie Merrill is dead; the shrubs are trimmed, the hedges cut down, the paths covered with asphalt, and the whole garden a dismal spectacle of precision, order, and expensive simplicity.

But on the morning when we returned

to look after our buried rose-leaves, no one had dreamed of these wretched improvements. Keeping well down below the hedge, we reached the lilies-of-the-valley without encountering any opposition. The place of burial was inspected and the earth searched for tracks.

None appeared.

Then we stood over the spot and meditated. A lilac bush sheltered us from inquisitive persons in the house.

Finally Ed Mason spoke.

"I wonder how they're gettin' on," he said.

"I wonder!" said I.

Then there was another pause. I poked my foot among the lilies where we had concealed the shingles we had used as trowels. They were waiting for Tuesday morning.

Ed spoke again.

"Let's dig 'em up and look at 'em!"

Already I was fishing for the shingles. In half a minute we had brought the grape leaf once more to the light of day. We unfastened it and gazed upon its contents.

It was a quarter past ten. Fifteen minutes had passed since we buried the mixture.

“Don’t you suppose they’re done?” I queried.

Ed’s only reply was to take a pinch between his fingers and convey it to his mouth.

I did the same.

Then we ate the whole lot. It tasted — and on this point I will pledge my word — it tasted exactly like rose-leaves and brown sugar !

## CHAPTER IV

### NAPOLEON JONES

ON an afternoon early in the following week, Jimmy Toppan, Ed Mason, and I were seriously engaged at the frog pond. We had discovered, in the morning, an outlet, through which all the water was in danger of escaping. The town authorities seemed to have overlooked this channel, but we could not let their neglect cause public suffering.

To have the pond run dry was too serious to contemplate!

"The water wouldn't *all* go out," asserted Ed Mason, "'cos there's a place, back of the Court House, where there ain't any bottom."

"That ain't in *this* pond," Jimmy corrected, "it's over in Davenport's."

But Ed stuck to his opinion.

"It *is* here. An' there was a volcano here once, an' when the volcano dried up, the pond came."

We looked with considerable interest toward the site of the extinct crater. But all was placid blue water now, and whatever might be concealed beneath the surface remained a secret.

Our duty was not the less clear, and we set out to build a dam that should keep in the water, volcano or no volcano, bottomless pit or not.

On the terrace above us sat an old man, who watched our proceedings, chewed tobacco vigorously, and whittled small sticks. We had seen him, sitting on the same bench, in the morning. Indeed, he had been there for days, perhaps weeks, past, until he had become a fixture in the landscape.



Ed Mason climbed the terrace to get another armful of stones for the dam. As he was returning, the old man called Ed to him, and offered, as a gift, a little musket whittled out of soft pine. The stones were laid down promptly, the gift accepted, and the two engaged in conversation. Jimmy and I could not hear what was being said, but we observed the incident of the little musket, and our interest in the dam waned. We went up the terrace to see if there were any more muskets to be distributed.

But when we arrived, the old fellow pointed at Ed with his jack-knife, and addressed us.

“He wants to know if I ever was in a battle!”

Evidently the question had been an absurd one. We gathered this from the tone of derision with which it was repeated, and we promptly showed our apprecia-

tion of its absurdity by grinning. We marvelled at Ed's obtuseness. Not to recognize this round-faced old man in the dark-blue suit as the very incarnation of war could only be downright stupidity.

"Was I ever in a battle?" he inquired with deliberate sarcasm. "Well, I don't know what *you* call a battle, but what do you think of a hundred an' thirty guns on one hill an' eighty guns on another hill, all blazing away at each other like Sancho?"

We thought well of it. It seemed to us a very respectable battle. But Ed Mason was destined to put his foot in it again. He held up the little pine musket.

"Guns like this?" he queried.

The old fellow looked at Ed for a moment. Then he turned his gaze toward Jimmy and me and shook his head sorrowfully.

"No, not guns like that. Them's what

the infantry has. A hundred an' thirty of them against eighty wouldn't be no battle. 'Twould be a squeamish. An' a darned small one at that. I mean *guns*. Don't you know what guns be?"

Jimmy Toppan spoke.

"Oh, I know! Cannons. Like the one they fired last Fourth of July, down at the foot of River Street."

"Yes, that's the kind, I guess. I wa'n't there. Dave Hunt was doin' that. I see in the paper they called him 'Gunner David Hunt.' I nearly bust over that. 'Gunner David Hunt'!"

He rocked forward and back on the bench, chuckling and repeating, "*Gunner David Hunt!*" from time to time.

"Why, where do you think he was durin' the whole war?"

We could not imagine.

"Down in Boston Harbor — that's

where he was. Why, he never smelled powder in his life !”

This seemed extraordinary to me. I had seen “Gunner David Hunt” on that Fourth of July, and if he hadn’t smelled powder that day, he must have been suffering with a fearful cold. I had smelled it distinctly ; even kept, as I was, at a discreet distance. For Mr. Hunt, working with the greatest activity in the midst of clouds of smoke, not to have detected the odor struck me as amazing. I was incautious enough to point out my impressions to the old fellow in blue.

He rewarded me with another such look of scorn as that with which he greeted Ed’s mistake about the guns.

“He never smelled powder, I tell yer. That means he never heard a shot fired in anger. He may have fired some of them guns down in that fort in Boston Harbor, at a hogshead floatin’ in the water,

jus' for practice. But he never stood up against the enemy an' give 'em back shot for shot. An' the paper called him '*Gunner Hunt*'! Oh, my Chris'-mas!"

He rocked forward and back again, and laughed long and heartily. As it seemed to be the proper thing to do, all three of us laughed, as well as we could, over the presumption of Mr. Hunt.

Then the soldier became serious. He took his walking-stick, held it out at arm's length, and pointed across the pond.

"Do you see that Court House over there?"

As it was the most prominent object in the landscape, and hardly one hundred yards distant, we instantly admitted that we did see it.

"An' do you see George Washin'ton over to the right?"

Yes; George Washington was plainly

visible. There he stood, on his pedestal, with his arm stretched out at his side, as if to smack any small boy who walked on the grass.

“Well, over beyond George Washin’ton was where the enemy’s batteries lay — they stretched from there up to Joe Peabody’s house.”

“When was this?”

We all spoke at once, and in great excitement. *Enemy’s batteries* on Elm Street!

The old man looked at us solemnly, and chewed with great deliberation.

“That’s to give you an idea how they lay on the field. This is on a small scale, you see. Our guns were right along this bank, from here to the fourth tree. No, the fifth. And that graveyard back there,” he turned around and pointed, “was ’bout in the same position, only it run down nearer where we are now. Down there

where the pond is, was near a mile of open — wheat-fields and so on. Everything was mighty quiet 'bout the middle of the morning, 'cos we'd been fightin' for two days, you see. We could see the rebels plain enough, an' knew they was up to some deviltry. But we knew the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte had his eye on 'em all right."

Napoleon Bonaparte! Our eyes opened at this. "Was Napoleon Bonaparte in this battle?" I asked.

"*Was* he?" returned the soldier, with great energy. "I guess he come pretty near bein'. He was in command of the whole army. Who did yer think was, excep' him?"

I had not given the matter much thought. But I replied weakly that I supposed Napoleon had lived in France.

"You did? Well, you got that out of a book, I s'pose?"

I admitted, with some embarrassment, that I did get it from a book.

"I thought so. Well, if you're so smart with your books, why don't you tell this instead of me? P'r'aps you was in this battle, hey?"

My face became uncomfortably warm. I could not think of anything to say. After waiting a little, the soldier continued.

"If this young feller, that knows so all-fired much, ain't goin' to tell us how this battle was fought, I might as well go on. As I says before, we could see their guns, an' we could see the rebels movin' about 'round 'em. Some of their guns was in a little patch of woods, over where that team is standin' now. It kep' on quiet for more'n two hours — no one firin' a shot. Then we see the rebels was gettin' ready. They moved some of their batteries. An' then the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte



rode up to me on his white hoss, an' he says, 'Bring out yer guns!' An' so I brought 'em out!"

My doubts vanished. That white horse was conclusive.

Ed Mason spoke in an awed voice:—

"What did you say?"

"What did I say? I says, 'All right, yer Majesty.' An' I fetched the guns round to the northwestward."

"What did Napoleon do then?" asked Ed.

"What did he do? He just sat there on his white hoss an' he watched to see if we did it all right. An' we lined 'em up smart, an' unlimbered, an' back went the hosses, an' there we was, all ready in no time. The Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte he says, 'First-rate, boys; you did that slick as grease!'"

"An' then the rebels let off two guns for a signal, an' then their whole hundred

an' thirty began to once, an' so did our eighty. An' that kep' up for an hour."

"Did any of their shots hit you?" inquired Jimmy.

"Not to speak of. They fired too high. Their shells went plumb over our heads, an' over the infantry, who was lyin' on the ground behind us, an' bust in the cemetary. Some of the gravestones was broke. Some of our men was killed when the caissons blew up."

We had no idea what caissons were; but they blew up — that was enough for us.

"Then the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte ordered us to cease firin', one battery at a time. That was where he was foxy. He wanted to make the rebels think our guns had been dismounted, or that we was out of ammunition, so's they would charge. And he fooled 'em, sure enough, for pretty soon they did charge!"

He paused, and bit off some more tobacco, while we jumped up and down with excitement. Then he pointed again with his cane.

"Do you see them three trees to the left of the white house? Well, bearin' a little to the right of them is a clump of bushes. There was some woods at that p'int of the enemy's position, an' they come outer them. We could see 'em plain as day, a long line of infantry, an' the officers on hosses. Some of 'em was in gray uniforms, but not all. We could see their flags, an' the sun shinin' on the bayonets. First one long line come, an' then another, an' then another. There was close to fifteen thousand of 'em — more than all the folks in this town!"

We followed his gaze across the pond, across the mall, to that clump of bushes. At any moment we expected to see the

gray-clad lines break out from behind them and start toward us with loud yells. But we had forgotten how securely we were planted behind the old man's batteries.

"It didn't take us a minute to open on 'em. We had our guns trained in no time, an' we made it mighty hot for 'em as they come across that valley. One bunch come right for my guns, but we had loaded with grape an' we just blew 'em to smithereens. They turned round, what was left of 'em, an' run back like Jesse. There was a rebel general on a brown hoss, an' his hoss went down, an' we nearly got *him*."

He stopped. After waiting a moment, we all burst out :—

"What happened then?"

"Why, nothin'. The battle was over. The rebels had skedaddled. But the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, he called

me 'round to his tent that night, an' he give me this cane."

"What, *that* one?"

"This one. He says, says he: 'I like the way you worked your guns to-day, an' I want you to keep this stick to remember me by. I cut it myself.'"

He let each boy of us take the stick in his hand and examine it reverently. It was a cane of some brown wood, with a round knob at the top, made of ivory or bone.

Then he took a fat silver watch out of his pocket, and looked at that.

"It's pretty nigh supper-time, an' I'm goin' along."

He rose from the bench and walked slowly away, limping slightly, and leaning on the cane — the cane that Napoleon had given him!

We walked toward our homes, maintaining a profound silence. On the other

side of the pond we met Rob Currier, who was catching hornpouts. He addressed us derisively.

"Was that old Napoleon Jones you were talking with? He been giving you some of his yarns? My father says he's cracked. He was in the Civil War, but some one got him all worked up about Napoleon, till he thinks he has seen him."

If Rob had hit each one of us in the face with a wet hornpout, the effect would have been more agreeable. We encountered a realist for the first time when we met Rob that afternoon. We were walking through a golden haze of romance, when he suddenly drew this leaden-gray cloud across the sky.

"You make me sick!" declared Ed Mason; "didn't he show us the very cane that Napoleon gave him?"

"Of course he did!" replied Jimmy Toppan.

And "Of course he did !" I chimed in.

So we fell on Rob Currier, dragged him down on the turf, and stuffed grass and clover down the back of his neck until he yelled :—

"I take it all back !"

Then we let him up.

## CHAPTER V

### A RUN ON THE BANK

IN the garden, at the side of our house, there was an apple tree. There were two routes to the top of it. One, the common everyday path, was obvious and easy, almost like climbing a ladder. You took hold of the large limb nearest the ground, curled one leg and then the other around it, and so wriggled upon its upper side. From that point you could climb from one branch to another, without any difficulty, till you had reached the top of the tree. That was the prosaic method for ordinary occasions.

But when hard pressed by enemies, when the shrieking Indians were at our



very heels, or a Bengal tiger with dripping jaws uttered his frightful snarls only three feet behind us, then the circumstances called for a different route. It must be something not only quick, but risky. Time must be saved, seconds were precious. More than that, the fitness of things called for an element of danger in the ascent. There was no honor in the adventure if we climbed by the slow, safe path — the highroad, so to speak, of commerce and trade.

Blood was up; the blast of war blew in our ears.

So, at such times, we approached the tree from the other side, leaped high in the air to a branch above our heads, and, by a deal of swarming, shinning, pulling, and straining, reached the top.

Then, from amid the leaves, we could pour down a murderous fire from our trusty rifles, till every Indian lay stretched

on the ground, or the Bengal tiger gave one last bellow and expired.

It must not be thought, however, that these exciting moments, when the apple tree was an island of refuge, made it altogether a tame and profitless retreat in quieter times. It was enjoyable for rest and recreation, and it formed an excellent watch-tower from which to spy out the land. In May the pink and white blossoms turned it into an exquisite bouquet. Later in the summer the big green fruit — though not agreeable if eaten raw — could be transformed into the highest triumph cooks ever achieved — the apple-pie.

Near the top an almost horizontal branch made a tolerable seat. At about the level of our eyes, as we sat there, another branch stretched its smooth surface. The bark on it was new, and so plainly adapted to the use of a jack-knife

that the symbols "E. M.," "J. R. T.," and "S. E.," deeply carven, indicated that Edward Mason, James Rogers Toppan, and Samuel Edwards had left their signs manual upon it.

On the day of which I speak these gentlemen sat on the horizontal branch and devoured the contents of a roll of peppermint lozenges. I had had a cent that afternoon, and had expended it in this highly satisfactory form of pleasure.

You got twelve tiny lozenges for a cent, and that made four apiece all round. In buying them you had to make serious choice between peppermint in yellow wrappers, checkerberry in green wrappers, cinnamon in pink wrappers, clove in brown wrappers (especially alluring because reputed to be dangerous — cloves having the well-known habit of "drying your blood"), and rose in purple wrappers — a particularly insipid flavor, often

tried in the hope that it would taste different this time.

The fun was not all over when you had eaten the lozenges (by a slow process of suction), for there still remained the paper wrapper. This had always printed upon it some legend of more or less interest. The yellow one, that inclosed these peppermint lozenges, bore a few moral and patriotic sentiments concerning the Father of Our Country.

The three personages in the apple tree thereupon engaged in a discussion on the subject: Who was the greatest man that ever lived? Jimmy Toppan and I declared for George Washington, but Ed Mason, for some unexplained reason, brought in a minority report for Amerigo Vespucci.

Then Jimmy Toppan was moved to relate an anecdote.

"I heard somewhere that George Wash-

ington, or p'r'aps 'twas Daniel Webster, but anyhow it was *some one*, when he was a boy, once put a coin in the bark of a tree in his father's orchard. Then, a long time afterward, when he was President of the United States, he came back there, and went right up to the tree and took out his jack-knife and cut away the bark, and there was the piece of money! You see, the bark had grown over it, and covered it up all those years."

This was an interesting bit of information!

All of us were instantly filled with a desire to follow in the footsteps of the great. Here was the tree, and here was the bark. But the coins were lacking. The only one we had possessed that afternoon had gone for peppermint lozenges. Fourth of July money must not be touched. Perhaps, however, a special appeal to the authorities would be successful. We

agreed to make application to the lords of the treasuries, and each to come tomorrow provided with a cent.

The agreement was kept, and the following morning saw us at work on the bark of the apple tree. Three incisions were made (each one working at that part of the branch nearest his initials) and three copper cents were duly deposited. Then we descended the tree, and left our treasure to the silent years.

"How long do you suppose it will take the bark to grow over them?" inquired Ed Mason.

"Oh, I don't know. Years and years. Washington, or whoever it was, didn't come back till he was an old man."

"Well, then, we ought not. They ought to be left there for sixty or seventy years, anyhow."

It was unanimously agreed that not less than seventy years must elapse before the coins should be disturbed.

We wandered out of the garden, down the street, and through the grounds of the Universalist Church. Drippings from the eaves of that building had unearthed hundreds of pebbles, and Ed Mason began selecting round ones for his sling-shot. Then he took that instrument out of his pocket and discharged the pebbles at a distant fence. But the sling-shot worked indifferently, and Ed pronounced the elastic worn out.

"You can get a dandy piece for a cent down at Higginson's," I observed.

Then the significance of the remark struck me, and I glanced guiltily away. There was a pause in the conversation, until the sound of a horn suggested the approaching Fourth of July.

"Only nine days till the Fourth," declared Jimmy Toppan. "How many bunches you fellers goin' to have?"

We counted on at least fifteen apiece.

"So do I," said Jimmy; "and torpedoes, and a horn."

"Horns are foolish," remarked Ed Mason; "girls and babies always have horns."

"That's all right," retorted Jimmy; "they *last*. You'll prob'ly be round Fourth of July afternoon, when you've fired off all your fifteen bunches of fire-crackers, wantin' to blow on my horn."

I put in a remark here.

"I'm goin' to have six sticks of slow-match, an' five boxes of Ajax torpedoes."

But it did not impress Ed Mason.

"Ajax ain't half as good as Ironclad," he announced.

Jimmy Toppan also had preferences.

"Have you seen those Chinese Aërial Bombs down at Johnson's? They're the biggest torpedoes you ever saw — each one as big as your fist! Gee! I'd like



to hear one of 'em go off! They cost a cent apiece, an' — ”

He stopped.

Somehow the conversation would get around to the subject of things costing a cent. It was most embarrassing. We had invested our capital for seventy years, and were already feeling the pinch.

The morning wore on, and though I observed both Ed and Jimmy to cast surreptitious glances toward the apple tree, there were no more references to the subject of cents.

In the afternoon I went over to Rob Currier's house, and found him engaged with the most fascinating weapon imaginable. It was a pop-gun made from a goose-quill. It shot small pieces of raw potato to a great distance, and did so with a loud and soul-satisfying pop.

His uncle had made it for him, said Rob.

He willingly let me experiment with it, but he was not interested to watch me very long.

"Let's go down and look at the fire-crackers in Johnson's window," he suggested.

"I'd rather stay here and shoot this pop-gun," I declared.

"I'm tired of it," he rejoined. "Sell it to you for a cent."

Again the cent!

I put down the pop-gun and accompanied Rob to Johnson's shop, where we spent twenty minutes with our noses flattened against the pane, choosing what we would take if Mr. Johnson should come out and invite us to help ourselves.

Mr. Johnson did nothing of the sort, however.

We agreed that our first choice would be a mine, which was described as "send-

ing to an enormous height nine colored stars, alternately green, purple, and carmine, and then exploding with a rain of golden serpents."

This point decided, we repaired to the Curriers' and spent the afternoon perfecting our skill with the lasso.

In the interval that evening, between supper and bedtime, I suffered much uneasiness.

Some member of my family read from the evening paper that thieves were reported in town. Instantly, I thought of the three cents in the apple tree. Surely it had been rash to leave them exposed. There was nothing in the story about Washington to tell what he did to protect his coin from thieves. How would he have felt if he had come back, President of the United States, and found that some one had stolen his cent?

Moreover, there was always the chance

that I might never become President. In all fairness, I had to consider that.

Suddenly the thought of Rob Currier's pop-gun recurred to me. I needed that pop-gun.

Once during the night I got up and looked out of my bedroom window to see if the apple tree were safe. It seemed to be standing serene enough in the moonlight, but who could tell what marauders might besiege it ?

In the morning my mind was made up. As soon as I finished breakfast I hurried out, climbed the tree by the emergency route, and began to cut at the bark where my cent was concealed.

I had it in an instant.

As I was working I noticed that the other two cents were gone already. I turned around and looked down Oak Street. Jimmy Toppan, with one fist tightly clutched, was running at full speed

toward Johnson's and the Chinese Aërial Bomb.

Ed Mason was nowhere in sight. Apparently he had withdrawn his deposit even earlier.

## CHAPTER VI

### HORACE

DURING that week before the Fourth of July the days passed with incredible slowness. One afternoon, to beguile the time, I went over to Horace Winslow's house.

Horace, from the standpoint of most of us, was entitled to sympathy, — he was being "brought up" with so much care.

Not that any of us were neglected. School was our portion, Mr. Colburn's and other improving but uncomfortable books were our fare through nine months of the year. On Sundays we were duly despatched to the school appropriate to that day. We each carried the traditional cent for the contribution box. And, as in the story-books (which are

sometimes faithful transcripts from life), it was with difficulty that we passed the traditional drug shop, which displayed the traditional peppermint lozenges and "coltsfoot."

And, still in the traditional manner, the Tempter's voice was loud sometimes in our ears, — so loud that we turned and entered Dr. Dibden's shop, and spent that cent for a roll of lozenges, or a piece of coltsfoot, or of "stick lickrish."

But if we did this thing, so did Horace Winslow. And if, occasionally, we had to be sent from the dinner-table to remove a few burrs from our coat collars, or to make another attempt with the hair-brush, so had Horace. In such matters his experiences were not different from those of the other boys in the neighborhood.

His mind was being improved, — that was all.

It had not injured his health to any extent. He presented, on that afternoon, his usual round countenance, and red cheeks. A pleasing plumpness was his most noticeable characteristic, — not the lean air of the scholar.

I found him making a suitable home for his turtles, and I joined in the work with enthusiasm. The turtles had been straying lately, and it was clear that something had to be done. It is distressing, after you have lavished any amount of attention on a turtle, and have tied him by a long string so as to give him wide liberty, to find in the morning that he has twisted and tangled the string amongst the grass, and then departed, leaving one end of the string buried, as if in derision, in the ground.

We set out to construct a turtle-proof pen from boards and shingles.

“I came pretty near losin’ all the turtles,” said Horace.



"Did they break the strings?" I asked.

"No, — only one of 'em. But Aunt said she didn't know but I'd have to put 'em all back in the pond."

"What for?"

"'Cos I took one of 'em to bed with me night 'fore last."

"Which one?"

"That big one, with the yuller spots."

"Did she mind?"

"Who, — Aunt Cora? You bet she did! I put him in the bath-tub to give him a swim in the mornin', an' I forgot him when I went to breakfast, an' then right after breakfast I had to go down town to get a yeast-cake, an' Aunt found him swimmin' round in the tub, an' she said 'twas horrid to have turtles in the tub, an' she wanted to know when I put him there, an' so she found out I'd had him under the pillow all night, an' she was awful mad! I thought she was goin'

to lick me, but she didn't. I didn't dare tell her I'd had another one up there the night before, — the little black one. He's a jim-dandy, — the best turtle I've got. His name is Pete."

I agreed that Pete was a very desirable turtle. And I put in a request.

"Tell me if your Aunt makes you put 'em back in the pond, will you?"

"She won't. She said I could keep 'em, but I can't bring 'em inside the house. Gee! She's been awful cross lately, though. Last night again. An' Uncle, too. We went in swimmin' out to Four Rocks, — I mean I did, an' Ben Spauldin', an' Harry Fletcher, an' —"

"How'd you go?" I interrupted; "out the railroad?"

"No, we got a ride on Dole's wagon to the green, an' then went out the middle road. While we were in the water, two fellers came along, an' grabbed most of

my clothes, an' Ben's, an' run up across the track, an' chucked 'em into Mr. Harris' shanty, an' then run off laughin'; an' I run up to get 'em, an' just as I got up on the road Aunt an' Uncle came drivin' along with Mr. Benton, an' they were mad as hops 'cos I didn't have anythin' on, an' Uncle was goin' to make me get into the carriage an' get under a robe, till I told him my clothes were in the shanty."

"What did he say?"

"He said I'd ought to have taken better care of my clothes, an' Aunt said it was disgraceful runnin' round stark naked on the road, an' she was mortified to death, an' I couldn't go in swimmin' any more if I didn't behave, an' — oh, darn it all, is that two o'clock?"

It was certainly two. The North Church clock struck the hour distinctly.

"I s'pose I'll have to go in, now," he announced sorrowfully.

I was about to ask the reason, when the voice of Mrs. Vincent, Horace's aunt, came from behind the closed shutters of a window.

"Horace !"

"Oh, I don't want to come in now !"

"Horace !"

"Well, I don't, Aunt. Sam Edwards is here, and we've got to build this turtle-pen."

"HORACE !"

"I can't leave Sam here all alone, Aunt. 'Twouldn't be polite."

"Horace, come in the house instantly. You may bring Samuel with you."

"Oh, he don't want to come."

"*Doesn't* want to come, you mean. Wouldn't you like to hear me read to Horace, Samuel ?"

I was greatly interested in the turtles,

but I was also fond of being read to. Apparently I was going to lose the company of Horace, anyhow. Moreover, I was afraid of Horace's aunt. So I meekly said:—

“Yes'm.”

But Horace still raised objections.

“We can't leave the turtles like this Aunt, — they'll all get away.”

“Horace, mind what I say this minute. You can make the turtles safe enough. I will give you three minutes longer, and if you are not indoors then, your uncle will punish you this evening.”

We collected the wayward turtles and put them in a garden basket. A few seconds later we presented ourselves before Mrs. Vincent, who looked at us ominously 'over the top of a book. Horace sat down in one stiff-backed chair, and I in another. He began to screw his face into knots as soon as he saw the book.

It was unknown to me, and fifteen or twenty years were to elapse before I should know its title. Then, one day, reading Guizot's "History of France," I recognized a passage, and realized with what work we had been regaled, — when we wished to build a turtle-pen.

"Oh, Aunt —"

"Horace, be quiet. Sit up straight in your chair. Put your hand down."

She looked Horace over critically, and then began to read.

"The old parliamentarians were triumphant; at the same time as Abbé Terray, Chancellor Maupeou was disgraced, and the judicial system he had founded fell with him. Unpopular from the first, the Maupeou Parliament had remained in the nation's eyes the image of absolute power corrupted and corrupting. The suit between Beaumarchais and Councillor Goëzman —"

“Oh, Aunt, I don’t want —”

“Horace, if you are not still this instant, I will put you to bed !”

Horace’s articulations dissolved into snuffles and whines ; we both hitched and wriggled in our chairs, and the reading went on. We heard what Chancellor Maupeou said to the Duke de La Vrillière, and what M. Turgot wrote to Louis XVI, — if a process in which the brain took almost no part can be called hearing. These personages were strangers to me, but Horace greeted them as familiar enemies. I judged that he knew and hated them of old time.

An hour passed, a long hot hour. M. de Malesherbes had gone the way of Turgot, and Horace and I were reduced to a mere coma. Then the book was closed, and we were told that we might return to our turtles.

We did so with profound joy, and

Horace, seeing the Tiltens' cat hurrying over the fence, remarked that she was Chancellor Maupeou, and threw a green apple at her.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE GREAT DAY

FROM far off came a sound of popping and snapping, — some boy, unable to wait, was trying a few fire-crackers. It still lacked a day or two of the Fourth of July, and the strain was telling on us.

A door that was slammed or a whip that was cracked took on a new significance, while the fish-pedlers' horns seemed to have an altogether unusual note.

Underneath my bed was a box containing fifteen bunches of fire-crackers, ordinary size; three bunches of cannon crackers; two single gigantic fellows; and some sticks of slow-match. There were also the five boxes of Ajax torpe-

does, twisted tight in their red paper, and slumbering now in sawdust, but all ready to explode delightfully when the time came.

Jimmy Toppan had taken the wrappers from his fire-crackers, and separated the crackers. Slowly and painfully he had disentangled the fuses which some Chinese workman had skilfully braided together. It had taken a whole afternoon to do it, but now he had no one knew how many thousands of crackers, neatly piled in a large cigar-box.

He was prepared for the morning of the Fourth, when he could sit down in some convenient place, — the curbstone, for instance, with a stick of lighted slow-match in one hand, and the cigar-box full of fire-crackers beside him.

Then, with due deliberation, he could choose a fire-cracker, bring the glowing end of the slow-match to the fuse of the

cracker, throw the latter into the street as soon as it began to spit out sparks, and wait ecstatically for the explosion.

As soon as this had occurred he could repeat the whole operation, — for hours.

Untangling the fire-crackers had pulled the fuses out of some of them. These unfortunates were carefully put aside for “cat and dog fights.”

There were one or two green fire-crackers in every bunch, and occasionally a *yellow* one. These he herded by themselves, for use at especially important moments. That they make a louder noise than the red ones is a scientific fact well known to all experts.

I had not separated my crackers. It was a joy I decided to defer until the great day. There was a pleasure in seeing the bunches intact, and in observing the red wrappers with their gorgeous gilt dragons. You could smell the gunpowdery smell as

well as if the packages had been opened. But I counted those eighteen bunches of crackers every night and every morning, and sometimes during the day. And I had broken the top of one of the torpedo boxes and explored with my fingers in the sawdust.

There were twelve fat torpedoes in the box, and five boxes, and that made — that made — (oh ! Mr. Colburn !) it made sixty ! yes, sixty great, big, lovely torpedoes. Sixty beautiful bangs !

But one must be careful with torpedoes. They must be fired with care, one at a time, for the proper enjoyment of them. There had been accidents, — I had seen one the year before. Little Larry Paine had fired all his crackers before ten o'clock in the morning. He went into the house to get the last of his stock of explosives, — a box of torpedoes. The sawdust had been taken out, and he came

forth again with a dozen torpedoes loose in the box. As he reached the sidewalk the box slipped, and fell on the bricks with one terrifying crash. All the torpedoes had gone off together.

It was magnificent, but it was not war. It filled us with joy, but it filled Larry with woe. He lifted up his voice and mourned because they were not. With loud wails he retreated into the house, and his agonized family knew no peace for an hour.

"My brother Billy's goin' to the bonfire at midnight," announced Ed Mason, conscious of the glory reflected upon him by this fact.

But I was not to be outdone.

"Poo! that's nothin'. *My* brother's goin' to stay up *all* night; he an' Phil Coombs an' Arthur Monroe are goin' to sleep in Arthur Monroe's barn an' they're goin' to the bonfire an' they ain't goin'

to bed at all. Last Fourth he nearly got arrested for ringin' the High School bell!"

I was determined to leave Ed Mason not a leg to stand on.

"Well," he remarked weakly, "I'm goin' to get up at half-past three, anyway."

He had me there. I had parental permission to get up at four o'clock, and I had not expected to be surpassed in this important achievement by my own familiar friend.

It rankled with me all day, and in the evening I laid the case before my father and mother. For the honor of the family, as well as for my own self-respect, I simply had to get up at half-past three.

They were in doubt. It was going to be a long and exciting day for me. Aside from the exertion of firing my own supply of crackers and torpedoes, I was going at

noon to see "Gunner Hunt" fire his annual salute at the foot of River Street. Then there was the flag-raising on the mall at two o'clock, and the fireworks at March's Hill in the evening.

But they finally consented, and once more I could look Ed Mason in the face.

When the evening of the 3d of July came, I went cheerfully to bed at seven o'clock, in order to prepare for the labors of the next day. I counted my fire-crackers, and found their number complete. It was rather hard to get to sleep on account of the uproarious sounds from Main Street, — cannon crackers, muskets, revolvers, cow-bells, and horns. But finally I dropped off, — only to be disturbed by a dream that Auntie Merrill had come into the room and was making a raid on my fire-crackers.

It was a hideous nightmare, — she vanished out the door with her arms full

of my precious possessions, and I could not do a thing to stop her. When I woke I had to get up and count those fire-crackers again.

Then I climbed back in bed once more and listened to the distant noise. Somebody came down our street, dragging a string of cow-bells. The national holiday was being celebrated with diligence.

Suddenly it struck me that perhaps the morning had already come. In a panic I jumped up, lighted a match, and looked at the clock. It was eight o'clock, — I had been asleep less than an hour. Listening at the open window I could hear my family talking in the garden below. I remembered that I was to meet Ed Mason and Jimmy Toppan in that garden at half-past three, and that I had better get to sleep again.

I lay in bed once more, trying not to hear the din. All at once I became



aware that some one — my father — was standing at the side of the bed, shaking me.

“Sam! Sam! I thought you were going to get up. It’s quarter of four.”

“What?”

I jumped out, confused. There was a dim light outside, — not daylight, by any means. I began to dress, and fumble for the fire-crackers. Things seemed very different, somehow, from what I had expected.

As I went downstairs I heard my father say:—

“It’s raining, I think, — put on your rubber coat.”

Rain! How would the fire-crackers like that? 11

Outside I found Ed and Jimmy. They were rather silent, but inclined to be contemptuous because I was late. They had been fiddling around in the garden

for some minutes, waiting for me. Jimmy had an umbrella, and did not look very happy.

We went out to the front of the house, and sat down on the door-steps. Jimmy had his box of fire-crackers (which he managed with difficulty on account of the umbrella), while Ed Mason had his crackers in a canvas bag. Owing to the breeze, which was rather brisk, we had some trouble in lighting the slow-match. Just as we got it going the rain began to fall in a smart shower.

There was nothing for it but to retreat inside the house once more. This was a pretty sort of Fourth of July! The possibility of such an inconsiderate act on the part of Heaven had never occurred to us. Could it be that they did not know, up there, what day this was?

It was a little dull in the house. Jimmy and I both fell asleep, and so, I

think, did Ed Mason, though he denied it. Fortunately I found some raspberry turnovers in the pantry, and they helped alleviate our sufferings.

Shortly before breakfast the rain stopped, and the sun came feebly out. We were soon in the street once more, creating a racket that left nothing to be desired. Joe and Charley Carter joined us, and so did Rob Currier and Peter Bailey. Peter had a revolver, and he scorned fire-crackers. The Rev. Mr. Dimmick, who lived across the street, stood on the steps of his dwelling and beamed upon us. He looked as if he would like to celebrate, too.

Mr. Dimmick was a minister, which was too bad, because he was such a good ball-player. Charley Carter had an enormous cannon cracker, and when he started to touch it off, Mr. Dimmick called out:—

"Wait a minute, — you ought to have something to put over that, — a box, or a can, or something."

"I wish I had!" said Charley; "let me take that cigar-box, Jimmy?"

"I've got just the thing," shouted the minister; "I'll get it."

And he vanished into the house. Presently he came out again with a shining tin box. They lighted the cannon cracker, clapped the box over it, and ran.

Bang! went the cracker, and the box shot straight up in the air.

"Jiminy!" said Joe Carter, "'twon't never come down!"

It looked as if it wouldn't. It went up above the houses, above the trees, even. Then it started to fall, and as it did so a funny thing happened. For the seams of the box had all been blown apart, and only its swift upward rush had kept them together. As soon as it started on its

downward trip, they flew apart, and the box struck the earth, a flat sheet of tin, — flat as a fritter.

Just then Mrs. Dimmick came to the door.

“James,” she said, “I can’t find my new cake tin, — have you seen it?”

“Er — oh, what, my dear? Yes, Harold has just strayed off, — up the street, I think, — I’ll find him all right.”

And Mr. Dimmick hurried away.

We spent the morning, after breakfast, in the midst of a delicious cloud of powder smoke. “Dynamite” crackers had not been invented then, and nobody got hurt at all, — except Rob Currier, who burned his thumb slightly on a piece of slow-match. Charley Carter’s father, a man of untold wealth, bought a dozen bunches of fire-crackers, and fired them *a whole bunch at a time!*

We stood around in awe at the de-

lightful noise and the princely extravagance of it.

At noon all the church bells rang for an hour, and we went down to the foot of River Street to hear "Gunner Hunt" and his assistants fire a salute. Mr. Jones was there, leaning on his Napoleon cane, and regarding the spectacle with a sarcastic grin. It probably seemed a pretty small business to him, compared with his famous battle.

We had ice-cream for dinner, and strawberry shortcake, and ginger-ale. There were other things,—lamb and green peas, I believe, in which the grown-ups were interested.

In the afternoon we saw the flag-raising on the Mall. The Mayor made a speech, and so did General Cogswell, but the speeches did not appeal to us especially. Luckily a horse ran away, so we found some entertainment. Then

Dr. Macey treated us all to lemonade, and more ice-cream.

If we had had any doubts of what the Mayor said about the Declaration of Independence being the most important event in the history of mankind, such doubts would have been removed.

In the evening, as soon as it began to get dark, we joined the crowds wending down Elm Street toward March's Hill.

People who lived in that neighborhood, people whose back yards afforded a good view of the fireworks, found themselves suddenly popular. It was astonishing how many friends they had. Acquaintances whom they had not seen for a year began to invade their gardens, shake hands cordially, and show themselves perfectly willing to sit on their chairs and camp-stools, or even their back door-steps.

The fireworks passed off in the usual blaze of glory, and about half-past nine

I walked wearily home with my father and mother. Even then, we could see, through the trees of Elm Street, distant rockets streaming up the sky, pausing for an instant, and then vanishing with a far-off "T'lock !"

A shower of sparks hung for a while in the sky, disappeared, and left all quiet and black, except for the twinkling stars.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE GREEN CHEST

JIMMY TOPPAN was worth knowing for the sake of his grandmothers, if for no other reason. He had two of them. With one, and a great-aunt, he lived on Elm Street.

The other grandmother was mistress of a farm in the country, to which we often went. There were uncles and aunts there, too, but it was Grandmother Toppan who seemed best to understand our needs. When we were at the farm she knew the exact hours (about eleven in the morning, and again about half-past four in the afternoon) when a large slice of apple pie is most useful.

Tactfully and unfailingly she administered it at those times.

Grandmother Bradley, with whom Jimmy lived, ran Grandmother Toppan a very close race. Her favorite remedy for our troubles (certain hollow feelings which often afflicted us) was sugar-gingerbread. I will leave it to any one if it is possible to choose between two such excellent women.

The farm was, of course, a centre of attractions. Grandmother Bradley's domain, on a principal street of the town, was naturally circumscribed. Yet it contained one object of overwhelming interest.

In the basement stood a green chest. It was bumped and scarred, and, worse than all, it was locked.

Lovely things dwelt within it, so Jimmy said.

It had come across the seas with some

far-off great-uncle, and it was never opened. But if the cover should ever be raised, he who stood by should be envied of all boys. For inside was a large tank, filled with some liquid, the exact nature of which Jimmy never explained. In this silvery fluid swam or floated all manner of fairy shapes. There were mermaids, tiny golden fishes, and other strange inhabitants of the ocean. Enormous turtles reposed on the sands at the bottom, and gay little ships with bright rigging sailed overhead.

All of these delectable objects were made, by the cunning of some foreign workman, out of glass. The golden hair of the mermaids, the scales of the fish, the sand, the sea-shells, the monstrous whales, the sword of the swordfish, the flippers of the turtles, the little lighthouse that stood on the shore, the beautifully colored seaweeds that clustered about the

rocks, all of these — even the thread-like ropes and shrouds of the bobbing vessels — all were fashioned from brittle glass.

Did a boy ever have a more tantalizing vision dancing before his eyes ?

I stood and gazed at that green chest. A more stolid, unyielding affair cannot be imagined. It was dusty, and the corners of it were worn and rounded. The green paint which had covered it was faded, and in many spots knocked off altogether. Sailors' boots had kicked it, perhaps, or it had rocked about some cabin or hold when the waves of the real ocean had started a miniature tempest on the little sea within. What, then, had prevented collisions between the glass ships, or kept the mermaids from being shivered to bits on the reef ?

Some glass sailor must have steered the ships to safety, while the mermaids had

plunged beneath the waves to find calmer water below.

The solution seemed to fit the case, but how was I to prove it? How was I to look at any of these charming things? The chest was locked, and locked it was likely to remain. A sort of decree had issued from Jimmy Toppan's great-aunt: no one was to see the inside of the chest. Nay, more, one must not even ask about it. It was locked tight, and there was an end of it. I never heard Jimmy's great-aunt say this; I never mentioned the chest in her presence. Nor did Jimmy say that the unlocking of the chest was forbidden. He described its contents in a way to set my imagination aflame. He did not say definitely that he had ever looked in it. But he let it be known that it held such glories that a glimpse therein was a vision of fairyland. And he somehow cast an air of

mystery and awe about it, till I would no more have asked to have the cover raised than I would have presented myself, snub-nosed and with holes in the knees of my stockings, at the gates of Paradise with a request to be enrolled in the cherubs' chorus.

I never knew why there was such a curse upon the chest. But I gathered, somehow, that the great-uncle, or grandfather, or whoever he was, who had brought it from foreign parts, had uttered, with his dying breath, a solemn injunction that it was to stay closed. The opening of Pandora's box was to be a holiday recreation compared to opening that green chest. It was no more to be disturbed than Shakespeare's bones. Why he should have transported it such a distance, with such infinite care, and then sealed it up forever, passed my understanding. Did the prohibition ex-

tend to grown-ups, or was it only for boys? That, also, I never could find out.

I used to fancy that Jimmy's great-aunt stole down to the basement in the dark hours of night to gloat over the silver sea and its delicate inhabitants. Once, in the late afternoon, I detected her going chestwards, and I followed with beating heart. I got behind an apple barrel and watched her movements. But she only went to an ice-box, from which she took out a plate of mutton chops.

The intolerable curiosity aroused in me by Jimmy's account of the chest was equalled only by the fear I had to make any inquiries about it. I was convinced that a painful family secret overhung that green chest.

Night after night I dreamed that I had been permitted to look within. Sometimes it was all I had imagined, and more. The ships, the mermaids, the turtles,

and all the rest were there indeed. And others, new and indescribable forms, floated or swam in that enchanted ocean, glittering, fragile, wonderful. I could take them in my hand, play with them, and set them again in their element.

They did not merely act the lifeless part of china figures in an aquarium. They moved about with an intelligence of their own; the ships spread gauzy sails to catch a magic wind, and flew before it. The whales rose to the surface, disported themselves heavily, like true whales, and blew jets of spray into the air.

In the midst of my rapture I would wake; all the glass toys vanished, and I could have cried to find them gone. In the morning it would be impossible to recall these new figures. I remembered them dimly and more dimly as the hours of the day blurred my dream. The iridescent creatures turned to formless things



of gray and drab, and then lost themselves, to be found again only in another dream.

But not all my sleeping experiences were so happy. Sometimes I would seem to approach the chest only to have Jimmy's great-aunt rise from behind it, shaking a broom. At other times I would lift the lid and find inside the chest the crouching figure of the long-departed great-uncle. He would jump out, gibbering frightfully, and I would scream and wake up. Thus the chest became surrounded by terrors even when viewed by daylight. Jimmy's great-aunt was like another dragon set over the golden apples. She kept watch by day, while at night the goblin uncle came on duty.

So we began to steer clear of the green chest and to confine our activities to other parts of the basement. Much has been written of the joy that dwells in old gar-

rets. The basement is neglected. Yet, if dry and well lighted, it may have its points.

In this one much importance was attached to a plate of sand set on a table. This, so Jimmy solemnly averred, was for the purpose of discovering the presence of mice in the basement. If they ran over the sand, their footprints would betray them, and traps might be set. It did not occur to me to marvel at the obliging nature of mice who should be at such great pains to record their arrival. Observing that Jimmy's great-aunt often inspected the plate of sand and smoothed its surface over after each inspection, we looked to it that she should never be disappointed.

It is not hard to counterfeit small footprints, such as might be made by a scurrying mouse.

In an adjoining room there was a

steam-boiler — part of the heating apparatus of the house. The existence of this boiler, the discovery of clay in Davenport's field, and the always present need of marbles, these conditions led to the foundation of an enterprise that occupied a number of days.

The clay was brought from "Davenport's," and rolled into balls of the proper size. These were placed on shingles and set to bake beneath the boiler.

Visions of revolutionizing the marble industry spurred us on. We calculated that we could undersell the regular dealers and that profits would accrue. But although the clay balls were duly left beneath the boiler all night, there were defects in the finished product. The part that had rested on the shingle obstinately remained flat. We found no way of giving our marbles the glaze necessary to the real thing; so the dealers continued

to ask the exorbitant sum of a cent for ten, and did not have to break prices to meet our competition.

It is possible that the fact that there was no heat in the boiler had something to do with this fiasco.

After this, to keep our minds from wandering toward the green chest, we started the manufacture of gunpowder on a large scale. The raw material, rotting stone, could be procured from the sand heap and dump, which at that date (before the rise of city improvement associations) adorned the banking at the end of the frog pond. This dump had many attractions, not the least of which were the squash vines which trailed over it. They never got beyond the blossoming stage, but that did not trouble us. The possession of raw squashes would have availed us little. The flowers were interesting, and I scarcely need to point out

the value of the stems. We cut a slit near one end, and they became in our hands trumpets with which to blow soul-animating strains. It is, of course, necessary to scrape off the prickles with a jack-knife, or the lips of the performer are apt to suffer.

But these were by the way. The rotting stone, red, gray, brown, and black, was the most valuable product of the dump. We carried it to a broad, flat piece of slate which covered a cistern just outside the basement windows. Here, with hard rocks, we ground it fine. It then became, by the chemistry which worked so quickly in those days, gunpowder. The black dust was the ordinary article. Mixed with red or other colors, it was transformed into various high explosives. Then we stored it in packets in the basement, where it might be drawn upon in case of need — any

sudden attacks by Indians or pirates, for instance.

The day on which we stored the powder was not long after the Fourth of July. Our operations in the basement had to come to an end on that day, for Grandmother Bradley and Aunt Josephine were going away for a week. The house was to be closed, and Jimmy would stay with his Grandmother Toppan in the country.

The last time we entered the basement our eyes wandered toward the green chest. But neither of us spoke about it. I wondered if the chest would be stolen, or be burned up, or should I die and never look inside it? Already the little glass ships and fishes had become less real, though more beautiful, than the folks of elf-land. What small hope I had ever entertained of seeing them was dwindling to a pin-point.

I was never troubled by any suspicion

that the tank, the ocean, and the glass creatures existed only in Jimmy's imagination. Such doubts did not fret me then, nor afterwards. The green chest remained one of the mysteries of the believing years.

## CHAPTER IX

### WHITE PEACOCKS

DURING the time that Jimmy stayed at his grandmother's farm — a period that was lengthened to more than two weeks — we were all agitated by the approach of a circus. Excitement had reached such a pitch that when, three days before circus-day, Jimmy invited me to make him a visit, I was in some doubt whether I ought to venture so far afield.

But on a solemn promise from Jimmy's Uncle Will that he would personally convey me home, behind one of his own horses, at least twenty-four hours before the great event, I thought it might be safe to risk it. Jimmy could stay at the



farm (fully two miles away) until the very morning, if he liked. I preferred to be nearer at hand. So to the farm I went.

Certainly, no other place would have tempted me. It was, to our fancies, perhaps the most fortunate spot on earth. Historians and antiquaries might deny that it had been the scene of a proper Indian raid. *We* could see the loopholes from which the flintlocks had been fired, and mark the small window whence a dipperful of molten lead was poured, to discourage an Indian whose anxiety to come inside the house made him indiscreet. I have never heard any of the slaves to fact assert that the farm-house might not have seen the tomahawk flashing about its walls and heard the war-whoop ring out.

It was there in the days of tomahawks and war-whoops.

If the Indians had been so inconsiderate

as to pass it by, we were not going to let that trouble us. Certainly, a plough seldom turned the earth of the adjoining meadow without bringing to light a flint arrow-tip or the head of a stone axe — weapons which even the scientific historian might hesitate to attribute to the ministers and deacons of Puritan times.

There was the meadow itself, an enormous tract of land, as it appeared to us. In it, somewhere, dwelt the lord of the herd, a legendary bull whose uncertain temper might be aroused by the sight of a small boy wearing a plaid necktie with a single spot of red in it. He could detect this spot at half a mile, and the boy had better make for the nearest fence, and affect blue neckties exclusively henceforth. Thus the crossing of the meadow had that spice of danger without which life is tasteless.

There were other reasons for crossing

the meadow besides the mere braving of the bull. At its foot was a pond, rich in mud of primeval blackness, and well stocked with turtles and "green-leapers." Farther on was a bog and wood, deep and gloomy as the magic forest of Broceliande, and not less pleasing to us because it went by the more homely name of Pettin-gell's Swamp. Crows built their nests in its trees, and without its borders jack-in-the-pulpit held his springtime services. Beyond this, more meadows — salt ones this time; then the river, the sand-dunes, and the ocean.

The barns about the farm-house were full of sweet-smelling hay. You could bore long tunnels through this, and come out with your hair full of dust and spiders' webs. Certain cocks of salt hay stood outside. By climbing to the top of one of them, sitting down, and sliding to the bottom you could enjoy an exhilarating

exercise. It is only fair to say, however, that the salt water and occasional bit of mud which gave the hay its slipperiness had an evil effect upon knickerbockers, and furnished relatives with a subject for wearisome jest which dieth never.

Yet with all these methods of entertainment, Jimmy and I considered the peacocks chief among the attractions of his grandmother's farm. They did not really belong on the farm, but were the property of Mr. Bartlett, who lived at some distance. We judged that the owner of such exotic fowls must possess the wealth of Ormus and of Ind. The birds themselves were indifferent in the matter of domicile, and spent most of the day and all the night on the Toppans' land.

Their bedtime was an hour of unusual interest. They gathered about sunset around a large apple tree which stood near one corner of the farm-house. There

was much strutting and spreading of tails among the gentlemen of the party; the peahens moved about nervously, but with less ostentation. Both sexes raised discordant shrieks from time to time, for no purpose that we could discover.

When, one by one, they had taken up their roosting-places in the tree, they made an impressive spectacle, especially after night had fallen, and seemed to bring the jungles of Hindustan to our very doors.

They inspired a feeling of awe and mystery because of their radiant plumage and reputed value. It was the veneration which we felt toward the whole tribe that turned so quickly to terror in the matter of the white peacock.

The adventure flashed on us suddenly the morning after my arrival at the farm.

In a sand-pit beyond the orchard it was the immemorial custom to build fires and roast potatoes and other eatables. Marks

of fires long dead showed us that the practice extended far back, perhaps to the boys of prehistoric times, or to those whose fathers had shot the arrows whereof the flint heads lay beneath the surface of the meadow. Potatoes and apples were placed in the hot embers, and removed at the end of about twenty minutes. The apples were, by this time, roasted not wisely but too well. The potatoes had an outer region of softness, but at heart were firm and unyielding. Both were so covered with wood ashes that their consumption left streaks of soot all about the vicinity of the mouth, extending back even to the ears.

Potatoes and apples, thus prepared, had palled upon us. We sought for variety in the bill of fare, and this morning Jimmy proposed eggs.

"At clam-bakes they roast eggs in hot seaweed," declared Jimmy.

The idea was worthy, but eggs were not so easy to procure. A visit to the hen-house proved that the day's supply had already been gathered. Then, though Robinson Crusoe would hardly have done it, we applied at the kitchen. But Grandmother Toppan, who might have humored our whim, was away from home. The Power temporarily in command dismissed our request brusquely:—

“Ye byes git outer here, now, or I’ll be afther takin’ the paddle to yez.”

We did not know what paddle was referred to, but we understood that we had leave to withdraw. We wondered if Robinson Crusoe ever met with humiliating rebuffs like that. It was impossible; no tyrannous cook could lord it over him while he carried that long gun.

But we had no gun, so, in dejection and despair, we wandered again toward the sand-pit. As we crossed the orchard,

a startling event occurred. Some large bird rustled off through the grass, and in the little round hollow where she had been sitting gleamed four white objects. It was enough to renew our trust in the gods who favor the romantic in their everlasting encounters with the practical folk of the world.

For here were eggs !

And eggs obtained under conditions that our friend Crusoe need not have scorned. To us the adventure said in no unmistakable tones : Abase yourself not before cooks when your spoil is at hand. Trust Providence, as did the Swiss Family Robinson.

We hurried to the sand-pit, kindled the fire, and put in the eggs. I refuse to dwell upon their condition when we took them out, or on the difficulty attendant upon eating the two that remained unbroken, or what these tasted like.



People who think that the carnal joy of eating is of much importance at these camp-fires have vulgar, prosaic minds.

We heard the dinner-bell ringing just as we disposed of the second egg, and we hurried toward the house.

Ten minutes later (for it takes some time to remove from one's face and hands the evidences of a feast of roasted eggs) we appeared at the dinner-table. It was a long one, with Uncle Will at one end, Uncle Charley at the other. The eggs had not spoiled our appetites, and we ate, with nothing to disturb our pleasure, up to the point when blueberry pie came on. Then Uncle Will, his carving duties over, and his own share of the dinner consumed, leaned back in his chair and addressed Uncle Charley:—

“I was over at Bartlett's last night.”

“That so?” returned Uncle Charley.  
“Did you speak about the peacocks?”

"About the peahen that's setting in the orchard? Yes. He knew she had been setting there on nothing for three days. The eggs came from New York yesterday, and he said he was going to send Foley over with them this morning."

Aunt Ellen showed an interest in the conversation. "Eggs from New York?" she queried.

"Yes," replied Uncle Will; "from the Zoo. They're peacocks' eggs. *White* peacocks, too. They cost him ten dollars apiece — forty dollars for the four. I told him 'twas a risky thing to leave them out in the orchard. Said *I* wouldn't be responsible. Bartlett said the peahen wouldn't set anywhere else. He'd have to take the chance. What are you going to do with a man like that?"

I glanced out of the corner of my eye at Jimmy Toppan. He was trying to insert a piece of blueberry pie in his

mouth. Three times he made the attempt, and each time his aim was poor. I had a feeling as if my chair were sinking beneath me. The dining-room and the whole family of Toppans revolved about me in a blur.

*Peacocks' eggs! Forty dollars!*

I have no recollection of the rest of the meal. The elder Toppans talked together, I believe, but on what subject I have not the faintest notion.

In five or six minutes Jimmy and I were safely over the fence and running across the meadow. We had to stop once or twice for breath, but we covered the distance to the wooded swamp in record time. Back of a large oak, where we were nearly covered by ferns, we stopped and panted.

Jimmy spoke first.

"They don't hang people under sixteen years old," he said.

---

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure," he replied.

"They put 'em in prison, though," I remarked, "for life!"

"What'll we do?" asked Jimmy.

We debated the question from every point of view. Of one thing we were determined: we would never be taken alive.

"There's the circus," I suggested. "Don't you suppose we could join that?"

"Like Toby Tyler? He had a horrible time!"

"It's better than stayin' all your life in a dungeon on bread and water hollowed out of the living rock," I reminded him.

"I'd have to go home first and get my decalcomania book," Jimmy stipulated.

"Well, that will be all right; I'll get my punch."

About my most cherished possession was a discarded punch, formerly used by a real conductor on a train. It seemed that I ought not present myself to the circus people empty-handed if Jimmy were going to bring his book of decalcomanias. It struck me that I might be especially welcome, as a ticket-taker, if I had a punch. I could work in that capacity while I was learning to ride bareback, or qualifying for the position of ring-master, or perhaps — so high do one's air-castles tower — that of clown !

Why not ? Others had achieved it.

We decided to leave our refuge in the swamp, sneak up the meadow, pass the farm by a back route, and so to the high-road and home. Then, separating long enough to get the decalcomania book and the punch, we could camp for a night or two in Davenport's field, and join the

circus in the morning. By the time the peacocks' eggs were missed we would be far away.

The first part of the plan was carried out. We crossed the meadow stealthily, creeping a greater part of the way on our hands and knees. Once in a while, when this got tiresome, we would rise and walk in the normal fashion, which was probably just as safe, for there was no one within half a mile.

As we slunk by the rear of the barn we came suddenly on Mr. Bartlett and his man, Foley. There was no time to run. Mr. Bartlett addressed us genially.

"Hullo, boys! Want to see something? Look in this box. Peacocks' eggs — white peacocks, too. Very rare. We're going to set them under that peahen in the orchard. I suppose she's there all right, Foley?"

"Yis, sorr. She was at foive o'clock

this marning, sorr. Oi give her four ducks' eggs to kape her continted-loike."

"All right, then. Come on, boys. We'll see how she's getting on. We'll have to set a guard around her while she hatches these out. They're too valuable to risk. Do you suppose she'd stand for it if we put up a little tent around her, Foley? Big nuisance she won't set in some convenient place."

Mr. Bartlett and Foley walked on ahead, discussing ways and means for protecting the peahen against marauders. We followed, a dozen steps behind. The shadow of the dungeon fell no longer upon our path, and there was no necessity for joining the circus. We did not admit it to each other, but we felt it to be a happy release.

In a moment we heard Foley's voice.

"Here she is, sorr. An' settin' on nothin' again. Phwhere's thim ducks'

eggs gone, Oi dunno. Somebody's shtole thim, fir the birrd niver ate thim, shills an' all. 'Twill niver do to lave thim expinsive eggs here, sorr!"

Jimmy Toppan and I maintained expressions of innocent wonder.



## CHAPTER X

### THE FLIGHT

THE day before the circus found me at home again. Without delay I set out to find Ed Mason, Charley Carter, and any of the others who could give me the latest information on the topic that absorbed us all.

For, since the Fourth of July, there had been nothing so important as the approach of this circus. For two weeks we had studied the posters. Whether the hippopotamus would in very truth have a mouth somewhat larger than the door of the barn to which his portrait was affixed; whether the head of the giraffe would actually soar above the clouds, as represented; and whether a

beautiful lady would indeed stand on the tip of an elephant's trunk and airily juggle three baby lions and a Japanese parasol — these problems had vexed us for fourteen long days.

Charley Carter stuck out for the literal accuracy of the posters.

“Cos if it wasn't so, they wouldn't dare to print 'em — it's against the law.”

This was his argument. Truth to say, none of us were strongly inclined to oppose him. We were more than willing to accept the pictures as photographic.

This point decided without further discussion, we could devote our meditations to the circus itself. We could lay our plans and dream our dreams in all felicity.

To hear some of these plans I started toward the Carters', and fell in with Ed Mason on the way. In his garden we found Charley Carter, who told us of his own and other boys' projects.

Rob Currier would rise, it seemed, before three o'clock on the morrow, and go with his father to watch the unloading of the circus. Our desire to join in this expedition subsided when Charley related his adventures at a similar treat the year before. It was true that he had observed the dim but mountainous forms of elephants and camels outlined against the dawn, but he had also slipped on the car track and so sprained his ankle that he had to forego, not only the great street parade at 10 A.M., but the show itself in the afternoon. The possibility of any such tragic occurrence made Ed Mason and me decide to let the circus unload as best it could without our assistance.

But on this, the very day before the circus would exhibit, we were smitten by an unexpected grief. Charley Carter started the ball of trouble rolling.

"Are you fellers goin' to the side-show?" he asked.

And he added, complacently, "*I am.*"

We had not considered the matter. We supposed we were going. The pictures representing the attractions of the side-show recurred to us, and straightway it became an imperative necessity that we find out if we were going to see these wonders.

We repaired to our respective homes, but were soon back at the place of meeting with dolorous faces. The parental mind in the House of Edwards was at one with that in the House of Mason. The street parade in the morning we should see, and we should be suitably provided with red or green balloons for the more complete enjoyment of the spectacle. To the afternoon performance we should go, pockets filled with the peanuts of Mr. Mazzoni, who sold much better peanuts than the half-baked things supplied by the circus venders. These we

might share, if we felt so disposed, with the elephants. Pink lemonade we should *not* imbibe, as it was "miserable stuff." And the side-show we should not enter, as it was "vulgar."

Such were the terms of the ultimatum. To article one, concerning the street parade and the balloons, we signified our assent. To the second article, concerning peanuts, we also assented. Article three, which forbade pink lemonade, was accepted with the understanding that we yielded to superior force. But to the final article, prohibiting the side-show, we entered an indignant protest.

It was promptly overruled.

Can one conceive a more irrational position? What was this thing, vulgarity, which before now had stood in our path? Had the extra cost of admission to the side-show been the cause for the refusal, we could have

understood, even while regretting, the parental attitude.

But vulgarity — what was it?

To us the different exhibits of the show, as portrayed upon the posters, were both curious and wonderful. Were we not men and philosophers, passengers through life, and observers of the human show? Was it not our bounden duty to see all that was strange and marvelous in this great world? Well, then, by what right did our tyrants act? We were of the human race, and held none of its members alien.

Though it might be questioned if the dog-faced boy, the genuine mermaid, the lady with a body like a serpent, and the man of india-rubber skin, came unreservedly into the category of human creatures — still such objections were mere quibbles. A golden opportunity for delight and self-improvement was

being denied us, and for the flimsiest of reasons, so we straightway raised the standard of revolt and nailed it to the mast.

“Let’s run away!” said Ed Mason.

Really, it seemed the only possible suggestion. When you have simply got to reduce your hard-hearted parents to contrition, milk-and-water methods are useless. A blow must be struck — sharp and decisive. Then they will recognize your value, be properly humbled, and come around to a correct view of things.

Running away from home is at once the boldest of strokes and the most subtle form of revenge. It asserts your independence at the same time that it reduces your parents to humility.

We decided upon it, and then and there fixed the hour of five that afternoon as the time of our departure from home and kindred. We would sever all the ties

that bound us to civilization, and plunge into the trackless wilds.

Prompt to the hour, I met the resolute Mason on the farther side of the frog pond. He was simply yet appropriately equipped with a cap-pistol, and two bananas for provender while crossing the wilderness.

I carried a light sling-shot and a package of soda-biscuit. Game — partridges, antelopes, and other creatures — might be slain *en route*; while our thirst could be slaked at the brooks and streams.

We set out in silence, as became our high purpose. In a little over an hour we had penetrated the desert as far as Brown's ice-house, and there we decided to camp for the night. We had encountered no antelopes, buffaloes, nor other animals, except a herd of cows belonging to Mr. Haskell. They were being driven home by a small boy.



In a little grove of trees back of the ice-house we sat down and made our supper of bananas and soda-biscuit. The ice-pond provided water to wash down the meal. We faced the west, and received full in our eyes the rays of the sun, now rapidly approaching the earth.

For a time we beheld the spectacle of the sunset, though our minds were not upon it. We conversed upon the possibilities of adventure in the Far West, upon the circus which we were leaving behind, and, most of all, of the excitement probably now rife in our homes. Ed Mason, it appeared, had left a note behind him to inform his family of our departure, of the utter folly of any attempt at pursuit, and of the fact that our first stopping-place would be Omaha.

Why he fixed upon Omaha, except that it is remote from our home on the Atlantic coast, I am unable to explain.

By this time, we agreed, our families had begun to wish that they had treated us better in the matter of that side-show.

Some low hills rose upon the western horizon, and the sun disappeared behind them not long after we had finished supper. It cast a golden outline on a strange procession of dark gray clouds which now came out of the north and moved slowly across the place lately occupied by the ball of fire. They followed one after the other like uncouth animals — the dromedary with his hump was there, the elephant, and other figures, longer and lower, like serpents and lizards.

We watched them without speaking.

A faint breeze moved the branches of the apple tree over our heads. It was perceptibly darker now, and not easy to make out the details of the fields and meadows. Two men passed along the dusty road on the other side of the stone

wall. They did not notice us, but we heard them discussing a dog after they had vanished from sight. The sky in the east and north turned rosy, and its colors were reflected in the pond. A man with a lantern moved about Mr. Brown's barnyard for a while, then disappeared indoors, and presently a light shone from one of the windows of the house.

The glow in the west; the pageant of clouds, whose fiery edges had grown dimmer; the immensity of the overarching sky, still turquoise-colored — all these, together with the disappearance of the familiar landscape, conspired to make the two outlaws under the apple tree feel rather diminutive. The swallows had ceased their flight and gone to bed. Two or three robins screamed excitedly for a while, and darted in apparent hurry from tree to tree. Finally they became quiet, except for an occasional outburst of twit-

tering. Two bats began to flutter about, with their high, thin, squeaking cries like the opening and shutting of a new pair of scissors.

The darkness was far advanced; three or four stars were visible, and the pink tint had faded from the sky. The pond gleamed like silver, but its banks were black and mysterious.

"We ought to start awful early in the mornin'," said Ed Mason; "p'r'aps we better go to bed now."

He began this remark in a voice that sounded fearfully loud, but said the closing words in a whisper.

"P'r'aps we had," I agreed, — also in a whisper.

There was no one within hearing: it seemed strange that we should have to whisper.

In another way, however, it appeared quite proper to whisper.

I was reflecting that, aside from a night spent in a tent with two or three other boys, in Peter Bailey's garden, I had never slept outdoors. It also occurred to me that we had no bedclothes nor pillows. We had blankets that night in the tent, and made pillows out of piles of hay. The hay tickled the back of your neck somewhat, but otherwise it was all right.

"We might sleep in Brown's barn," I suggested.

"That's so," Ed replied.

Then an afterthought struck him.

"No; we couldn't do that."

"I don't see why not."

"Why, of course we couldn't. There ain't any barns on the prairies!"

I had never thought of that.

The objection was unanswerable.

"Besides," pursued Ed, with something like a shudder, "tramps sleep in these barns."

I abandoned the plan hastily.

"Could we get some hay from the barn?" I wondered; "there won't be any tramps in there now, will there?"

"I guess not. We needn't go all the way in, — we can reach some by just openin' the door."

He was on the point of rising when another objection occurred to me.

"Maybe Mr. Brown wouldn't like it."

"He hasn't any right to say anything 'bout it. In time of war they take what they want, don't they? They make a forced *levi*."

This subject of the forced "levi" had been discussed amongst us at some length in connection with Mr. Hawkins' cherries. Jimmy Toppan and Rob Currier had the impression that it had something to do with a clothing dealer on Main Street.

"Anyway," Ed remarked, "we can put the hay back in the morning."

This seemed to be a reasonable solution in order to keep our career as outlaws on a moral basis. So we arose and started cautiously for the barn. Before we had taken five steps in that direction, a voice spoke. It was a deep, resonant voice, charged with authority and menace. The word or phrase that it uttered was not, it seemed to us, especially relevant, but there could be no mistaking the import of its accent and tone. It came from the earth, from the sky, from nowhere in particular and from everywhere in general.

It said : "*Ker-r-rum !*"

Having said this, it was instantly silent. The final syllable ended suddenly, but yet with a twang as if some giant had touched the string of a great instrument.

The hush that ensued was appalling.

I had sat down, as if struck to the earth, the moment I heard the awful sound, and now I tried to address Ed Mason, who was leaning faintly against a tree. But I made three efforts before my vocal apparatus responded.

"Wh-what was it?" I asked.

He turned toward me, and said something in a whisper, which I could not make out. I sat still for a moment longer, then hitched myself toward him and repeated my question.

But he could not answer me.

Neither could he say whence the sound came. That was the horrible part of it — the vague immensity of the note. We remained motionless for what we thought a long time.

Then Ed suggested that we move our camp. Immediately the problem arose: in which direction should we move? While we deliberated, in whis-



pers, suddenly again, ominous and terrible :—

“*K'r-rum!*”

That sufficed. In three seconds we were over the wall and running at full speed along the highway. At the cross-roads, an eighth of a mile away, we saw the lights of a buggy. It contained certain male relatives.

“Hello, boys ! Going home ?”

We admitted that that was our destination.

## CHAPTER XI

### UP LIKE A ROCKET

ON the morning following our return from the flight, there was an uncomfortable chill about my house. When I met Ed Mason, I found that he had noticed the same coolness in his home. Nothing was said, no reproaches were cast upon us for our trip towards Omaha and the great West, but I understood, somehow, that I should not be invited to attend the circus in the afternoon. The necessary half-dollar did not make its appearance. Ed reported a similar state of affairs.

This was simply tragic.

We took counsel, and decided that in Horace Winslow, if anywhere, lay our salvation. He was a person of stratagem,

of plans and plots, and he might be able to show us a way out of trouble. Moreover, he had let drop some mysterious hints of influence which he expected to possess with the circus people. More than a week before he had darkly suggested that he might be connected in no inconspicuous position with the coming show.

His utterances returned to us now.

"Let's go over and see him," I suggested.

"All right," Ed Mason agreed; "or, say, you're goin' over to stand on the bank steps at ten o'clock to see the parade, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, we'll see Horace there, sure, — he always goes."

And it was so decided.

Before ten o'clock we all set out for Main Street, — Ed Mason, Rob Currier,

Peter Bailey, and myself, together with an unavoidable convoy of small sisters and other relatives. The streets had that appearance which circus day and no other always brought. Toy balloon men and sellers of paper whirligigs wandered up and down, and strange looking persons, clutching children with one hand and paper bags of luncheon with the other, stood or sat on the grass bankings, edge-stones, and lawns, in front of the houses.

Through a sort of family privilege enjoyed by Peter Bailey, and always exercised on such occasions, we took up our position on the steps of the Merimack Bank. Mr. Vincent, Horace's uncle, could be seen at his duties inside the bank, but he did not come out. Circus processions did not interest him.

Horace was unaccountably absent.

There were two or three false alarms, two or three mistaken announcements

by members of the crowd: "Here they come!" Twice we thought we heard in the distance the faint blare of brass instruments, as well as a deeper sound which Ed Mason declared to be the roaring of lions.

But at last they did come. Majestically, and with clashing cymbals, they descended Main Street.

At the head was a gorgeous wagon carrying a brass band. The men were in red coats, and they blew their trombones and cornets and beat their drums with the utmost vigor. A cavalcade followed, and then came four or five large and gayly painted carts, containing, so the pictures and legends indicated, the blood-sweating behemoth, the laughing hyenas, two Nubian lions, and the man-eating tiger of Bengal. But the carts were all closed, and the blood-sweating behemoth, if he were there, gave no sign.

Nor did the other animals. We had to be contented with their painted likenesses on the sides of the carts.

"Do you suppose they're inside there, now?" asked Rob Currier's small sister in a hushed voice.

"Of course they are," Ed Mason assured her scornfully; "I saw one of the hyenas through a crack when they went by."

"Look!" said Peter Bailey. "Here comes the steam calli-ope!"

Sure enough, there it was. A man in overalls was energetically shovelling coal into the boiler, and a charming lady with very pink cheeks sat at the keys. As the thing came opposite us, she began to play, and every ear in the vicinity was split as with ten thousand steam whistles hooting out "Climbing Up Dem Golden Stairs." The noise was deafening, and each boy of us resolved that if he ever

became rich, the first thing he would buy would be one of those delightful contrivances. Then he had only to hire a man to shovel coal into it, and he might sit all day and dispense music for miles in every direction.

The calliope passed, as all beautiful things do, and our attention was distracted by a herd of elephants, who slouched along, dusty and morose. Then came some more carts of animals, and then a brilliant zebra led by a boy in a red coat.

This boy looked up at us, grinned joyfully, and waved his hand.

"Why, it's Horace Winslow!" some one exclaimed.

It was indeed Horace. The red coat was evidently intended for a fair-sized man, for it hung below Horace's knees and gave him the appearance of wearing a single garment like a tunic. On his

head was rakishly perched a small red cap, similar to those affected by the monkeys who travel with hand-organs. Horace's face was warm and perspiring, and a good deal of dust, aroused by the elephants and the carts, had adhered to it. But it was plainly the supreme moment of his life, and no fussy considerations of cleanliness annoyed him in the least. Was he not a feature in a genuine circus procession, marching with the clown, with real elephants, and leading a proud and striped zebra with his own hand?

He grinned again, and waved his hand to us once more. We were petrified with amazement and envy. At that moment Mr. Vincent, cool and placid in seersucker clothes, stepped out of the bank. He was going down the street on some business errand, and he paused for a moment and gazed indulgently at the procession.



"There's Horace, Mr. Vincent!" we all shouted.

We were determined that he should know of this honor that had come upon his family. It was a fine thing to be cashier of the Merrimack Bank, the trusted guardian of thousands of dollars, but was not this mere dust and ashes compared with leading a zebra in a circus procession? If each generation of his family were to rise in this manner, where might they not end?

Mr. Vincent smiled at us, and said: "What?"

"There's Horace!" we all screamed, pointing our fingers; "don't you see him? Leading the zebra!"

By this time Mr. Vincent had adjusted his eye-glasses, and as he looked in the direction of his glorified nephew, that personage turned around for one final grin and wave of the hand. The change

in expression on the visage of the bank-cashier was extraordinary. From mild benignity it turned to purple-faced consternation.

“What?” he gasped; “what? *My Horace?*”

Then he descended the steps swiftly, and plunged into the crowd on the sidewalk. Apparently he was bent on overtaking his nephew, but the throng blocked his way, and Horace had turned the corner of the next street before his uncle could reach him.

Ed Mason and I did not waste time watching him, for we were discussing a plan. It seemed to promise success, and we only waited for the end of the procession to pass before putting it into operation. Then we detached ourselves from the others, and hastened through Main Street to Haskell’s Field, where the tents were pitched for the great show in

the afternoon. The field was nearly a mile distant, and the leaders of the procession had already begun to arrive when we got there. We wormed ourselves in between carts and piles of hay, amongst horses, venders of lemonade and peanuts, and dozens of boys and men. Horace and his zebra soon arrived and we sought him out in the crowd.

"I came out here at five o'clock this morning," said he, "an' I helped bring water for the ellerphants, an' hay for the horses, an' then that man over there who took the zebra gave me five cents, an' said if I'd lead the zebra in the parade he'd give me a free ticket for the show this afternoon. Tommy Cheney got inside an' helped a man feed the kangaroos, an' —"

"Do you s'pose we can water the ellerphants or anything?"

"I dunno; it's nearly twelve o'clock

now, ain't it? I've got to go home an' get dinner so's to be back here at one, if that man should want anything more, an' you can come back with me then, if you want to, an' p'r'aps you can do something an' get a ticket."

We wanted no other invitation than this. We went back to town with Horace, determined to follow his plan. Like him we would demand our dinners early, and return to the circus field at one o'clock, under his guidance. Doubtless his influence with the zebra man would be all that was needed.

Horace had given over the red coat and hat (but not the dust on his face) to the circus men, and he arrived excited and dishevelled at his uncle's house. He left us at the gate, but we paused an instant, for Mrs. Vincent stood on the veranda to welcome him.

"I want dinner right away, Aunt,

'cos I've got to get back to the circus by one o'clock, an' —"

"Horace Winslow, you come into the house this instant, and take off every stitch, and get into the bath-tub. Look at your face! Get up to the bath-room, quick! The tub is all filled —"

"Oh, Aunt, I can't stop to fool with taking baths, — I want dinner, 'cos I've got to get back there at one o'clock."

"Get back there indeed! Not one step out of this house do you go this afternoon. Take off your jacket before you come into the house, — did you have it on under that horrible red thing? Give it to me, — it's going to be burned up as quick as I can do it. Quick!"

"Oh, Aunt, I've promised the zebra trainer to be back there, — why they're dependin' on me! I've got —"

"Not one step! Do you hear? Now,

upstairs with you, and into that bath-tub !”

Horace vanished into the house, followed by his aunt. Ed Mason and I looked disconsolately at each other, and started wearily toward our homes. If any one’s influence were going to admit us to the circus, it was not Horace Winslow’s.

In the parade he had flashed before our eyes like a rocket, and his descent from glory had been as sudden as the stick. He had declined in power ; from a magnificent zebra leader he had become an insignificant atom in a bath-tub. Even before we were out of hearing he uttered a loud howl.

And this was followed by a monitory voice :—

“*Horace !*”

## CHAPTER XII

### SUSY

WE passed the afternoon gloomily. There seemed to be no use in returning to the circus field without the once influential Horace. Except for him, we appeared to be almost the only persons who had not gone to the circus.

Horace, we presumed, would have to spend the whole afternoon in that bathtub. We could imagine his misery.

The hours wore on, somehow, and about five o'clock the fortunate ones began to return. We saw a group of them go into the Carters' side yard, and so Ed and I strolled over there to increase our suffering by hearing them recount what they had seen.

Seven or eight boys and girls were sitting on the steps of the veranda. Both the Carters were there, and Harry Fletcher, Susy and Minnie Kittredge, Ed Mason's sister Florence, and one or two others. Flossie Mason, being fifteen and grown up, had not been to the afternoon performance, — she was going in the evening with her mother.

The eyes of all of them were still wide open, for in their vision mingled strange animals, galloping horses, and tumbling clowns, while the fascinating odors of trampled grass, freshly turned earth, sawdust, pop-corn, and rubber balloons lingered in their nostrils.

Susy Kittredge, of course, was talking. She was beginning, in retrospect, her tour of the tents.

"An' it rained just before we got to the circus, an' the rain went through the tent an' washed the stripes all off



the zebra an' he was all pinky-streaked, an' Dan Rolfe said he wasn't nothin' underneath but just a donkey, an' —"

"Don't say 'wasn't nothin',' Susy," said Susy's older sister, Minnie.

Minnie was a prim little girl, with black hair parted in the middle, and drawn into two tight pig-tails.

"Well, he wasn't," retorted Susy; "an' there were puddles of pink paint all round his feet where the paint washed off, an' Rob Currier touched him, an' got the end of his finger all red, an' Louise Mason said it was zebra blood an' it's deadly poison an' Rob'll have fits an' die!"

Susy opened her eyes still wider, and regarded us all with the pleasant feeling that accompanies the disclosure of horrible news.

"There were a lot of real donkeys next to the zebra, an' one of 'em had on the saddle that the monkey rode on in the

precession, — an' he rode him again in the race, too, an' next to them was a antelope in a cage, an' then a ger-noo —"

"A *what*?" inquired Ed Mason, in a tone of deep scorn.

"A ger-noo," said Susy; "but he was asleep —"

"That ain't ger-noo," Ed returned, "it's '*noo*,'— just like that."

"It isn't! It said 'Ger-noo or Horned Horse' right on the cage. I guess I saw it, Ed Mason, and you weren't there, so what do you know 'bout it?"

"I don't care," replied Ed, doggedly, "'tain't 'ger-noo.'"

Susy puckered up her face and seemed about to cry, but Flossie Mason remarked hurriedly: "Never mind, Susy. What was in the next cage?"

"Oh, there was —" and then Susy's mind jumped ahead — "there was a countryman with a big umbreller an' just

as the lady was goin' to dive into the water he came along right in front of us an' said he'd give any one three cents for a seat, but of course no one would give him a seat, 'cos they cost seventy-five cents, an' he got into a fight with another countryman who was sittin' in the front row, an' tried to pull him out of his seat, an' a great, big, fat p'liceman came runnin' an' tried to arrest 'em both, an' they grabbed *him* an' pulled him over to the tank, an' all three of 'em fell into the water, an' the tank was all full of 'em, swimmin' round, an' they had to stop the circus an' get 'em out!"

Susy stopped for breath, and Ed Mason found time to ejaculate:—

"Hoh! that was all made up! They were clowns, all of 'em!"

"They were *not* clowns. They were dressed up just like *men*!"

"That's all right," I put in, "they were

clowns just the same. They go round with the circus doin' that. I saw 'em do somethin' like that last summer, only there wasn't but one countryman, an' they drove 'em off in a wagon with donkeys."

"They weren't clowns!" Susy stamped her foot. "Clowns have white faces, an' funny clothes, an' there were two real clowns helpin' get these men out, they stopped bein' funny an' were awful scared 'cos the p'liceman couldn't swim, an' he floated round on top of the water, an' when he got hold of the rope he was so heavy the clowns couldn't pull him out an' *they* fell in, too."

"That's so," said Charley Carter, with a serious countenance, as he recalled the catastrophe; "an' a man that sat in front of me said he knew the first countryman, — the one with the umbreller — he lives over in Rowley."

There was a ring of truth about this which made Ed and me subside, and as Charley Carter had attracted the attention of the assemblage, he tried to hold the floor.

“When they got the perliceman out —” But Susy had no intention to let any one else tell the story. She took it up at that point.

“— he was all drowneded, an’ they put him down on the ground, an’ begun to roll him round, an’ one of the countrymen went an’ got a big pop-squirt, oh, ten times bigger than any you ever saw, an’ filled it with water, an’ squirted it right in the p’liceman’s face, an’ that made him mad, an’ he jumped up an’ chased the countryman round the tent with his stick, an’ at last the countryman ran out through the place where the horses an’ riders come in, an’ I don’t know whether he caught him or not.”

"What did the other countryman do?" asked Flossie Mason.

"I don't know; the chariots came by then, an' I didn't see 'em after that."

Joe Carter then made his first offering to the conversation.

"Ben Spaulding drank eight glasses of lemonade, — four pink and four yellow."

The irrelevance of this bit of gossip did not make it any the less interesting to us. Instead, it gave Susy a chance to play once more her favorite rôle of proph-  
etess of woe.

"Pink lemonade's made of coachyneel, an' that's deadly poison. My mother knew a boy that drank pink lemonade an' died of it."

"I don't believe it," put in Harry Fletcher.

And he added, in a tremulous tone :  
"I drank two glasses of it."

We all turned and looked at Harry,

as at one who would not long be with us.

"How do you feel?" asked the elder Carter.

"All right," replied Harry; but he had a sickly expression about the mouth. He turned a little aside, and did not seem to take any further interest in the conversation.

"I gave two bars of pop-corn to the ellerphants," announced Susy, "but I don't like 'em very well. They're all covered with dust an' they curl their trunks at you. I—"

"An elephant's trunk is called his bosphorus," said Minnie, anxious to grace the occasion by a little learning.

And she added: "My teacher told me so."

"I just threw the corn at 'em," continued Susy, "an' they picked it up out of the hay. One of 'em held up his trunk,

an' his mouth was right under it, an' a man threw peanuts into his mouth, an' the ellerphant stood that way an' let the man throw peanuts at him ever so long, an' we had to go away then, 'cos the show was goin' to begin."

"You have to be careful of elephants," said Minnie. "Last year there was an elephant in the circus, an' he had whiskers on his trunk, an' Billy Mason pulled 'em, an' the elephant didn't say anything, an' didn't do anything for two or three minutes, an' then just as Billy was starting to go he swung his trunk round an' if Billy hadn't dodged quick the elephant would have killed him. An' there was a man there an' he said that if that elephant ever sees Billy again, even if it's a hundred years from now, he'll remember him, an' he'll try to hit him again with his trunk."

Cheerful Susy instantly remarked:



"Billy's goin' to the circus to-night. Do you s'pose that ellerphant will be there?"

Billy's sister tried to take a hopeful view.

"Oh, this is another circus, — 't isn't the same one that was here last summer."

But nothing could discourage Susy.

"Perhaps they've swapped ellerphants," she suggested.

Harry Fletcher rose from the steps at this moment, and observed in a shaky voice, that he guessed he would go home. He walked up the garden path with rather feeble steps. We watched him, — awe-struck.

"Perhaps it's the coachyneel in his insides," whispered Susy.

We pondered over this suggestion for a few moments, and it certainly seemed reasonable. When Harry disappeared down the street, walking slowly, and

holding to the fence, we decided that it was only a question of a few hours with him. The incident cast a gloom over us, which was not dispelled until Joe Carter said:—

“Did you go to the side-show?”

“No,” answered Susy; “my mother says side-shows are horrid.”

“They *ain’t*. This was great. There was a lady without any body, — just head and shoulders sitting in a glass plate, an’ there was a man that would let you stick pins in him, an’ there were some grave-robbing hyenas —”

“Poo!” said Susy, “I saw some hyenas in the animal tent, an’ we stayed to the concert an’ —”

“Yes, I know,” persisted Joe Carter, “but those hyenas in the animal tent weren’t grave-robbing ones. Now these, —” and he entered into some grewsome details about the hyenas that made Susy

regretfully admit that the side-show must have had its good points.

"But there was a sea-lion," she reflected, "havin' his supper when we came out of the concert, an' he sat up on a board, an' the man tossed him fish, an' he roared lots louder than the lions, an' we saw the giraffes —"

"That's nothin'" said Joe; "so did I."

Susy paid no attention, — she was in full swing of narration.

"An' there was a Happy Fam'ly of a monkey, an' a armadillo, an' a dog, an' a kangaroo, an' a porcupine, all livin' together in one cage, an' when the monkey would try to tease the kangaroo, he'd just roll himself up in a ball an' —"

"Who would?" interrupted Ed Mason.

"The kangaroo, course — just like the picture of South America in the geography."

But the cynic voice of Mason was not stilled.

"Kangaroos don't roll themselves up in balls."

"This one did."

"No; that was the armadillo you were lookin' at."

"My mother said it was a kangaroo, an' it *was* a kangaroo, an' you'd better keep quiet an' leave me alone, — I guess my mother knows more'n you do about it."

Ed sulkily muttered: "'Twa'n't a kangaroo," but Susy went on with her catalogue of beasts.

"There was a bore-constrictor there that can crush eight men at once, — one of the circus men told my mother so, an' she said, 'I should think you'd be afraid he might get out, — he could squeeze through the bars, couldn't he?' And the man said he was scared for his life all the time. The bore-constrictor *did* get out up in Lynn."

"Did he crush eight men?" two or three of us asked at once.

"No; they lassoed him. But he may get out again *any time*. An' there was a hippopottermus that you couldn't see, except one eye, 'cos he kept down in a tank of water, an' he was horrid, an,' oh! I forgot! Alice Remick had on a new dress an' she went to give an ellerphant a cookie, an' the ellerphant switched up his trunk and spattered her with mud so it spoiled her dress, an' she got both eyes stuck up with mud so she couldn't see, an' she cried so her father had to go right home without seein' any more of the circus, an' — "

"Did one of the elephants come in and ride round on a big velocipede?" demanded Ed Mason.

"No," said Susy; "but —"

"Did the seals play on drums, an' cymbals, an' sing?" he persisted.

“No; but they —”

“Oh, well,” replied Ed, “they did at the circus last year. An’ this circus only had ten elephants. Last year they had fourteen. An’ last year they had a Black Tent of Myst’ries, too. I don’t b’lieve this was much of a circus!”

With this remark we both thought we might effectively take leave. We departed together, and as we left the garden we could still hear the shrill tones of Susy:—

“— an’ there was an ejjicated pig that sat up in a chair with a ruffle round his neck, an’ they said he could read, but he didn’t, an’ one man fell out of that swing, an’ we thought he was goin’ to get killed, but he fell in a net an’ jumped up an’ kissed his hand, but my mother says they *do* get killed, — *often*, an’ there was a cinnamon bear —”

As we walked by my house Ed Mason repeated his remark:—

"I don't b'lieve 'twas much of a circus."

My father looked suddenly over a hedge and said: "Then you couldn't arrange to go with me this evening?"

We both jumped. We were startled at his voice, and there was also something in what he said that seemed to make the sun burst out of the clouds.

Perhaps it was not well to judge the circus without seeing it.

"Because I am going," he continued, "and I should be glad of your company, — unless, of course, you are leaving for Omaha?"

## CHAPTER XIII

### ARMA PUERUMQUE CANO

IN the warfare that raged through the neighborhood it invariably fell on Ed Mason and me to support lost causes.

As the two smallest, we were told off to represent the English at Bunker Hill. It was a revised and thoroughly patriotic Bunker Hill, for the English never reached the top, but had to retreat under a galling fire of green apples.

As Confederates, we dashed boldly but ineffectually across the valley at Gettysburg.

When the honor of the Old Guard at Waterloo was in our keeping, we did not die, but we did surrender ignominiously,



and were locked up in a box-stall in Peter Bailey's father's stable.

After that, the allied forces, consisting of Peter, Rob Currier, Joe and Charley Carter, and Horace Winslow, basely withdrew to inspect Auntie Merrill's pears (which were nearly ripe) and left us Napoleonic veterans to wither in captivity.

It was not only in struggles among ourselves that we had to drink of the bitter cup of defeat. When we banded together against the common enemy, things were not much better. Take, for instance, the time when Peter Bailey decided to turn the stable into a police station. The stalls suggested cells (there were no horses kept in them), and the success with which the Old Guard had been imprisoned after their crushing defeat at Waterloo, showed the desirability of more captives.

At first things took their usual course.

Ed Mason and I were informed that we were a gang of cutthroats, burglars, highway robbers, pickpockets, counterfeiters, and other kinds of ruffians, and bade to sneak about the streets. We were warned not to run too fast when the police approached to arrest us, and told that it was "no fair" to make any determined resistance.

When Peter Bailey, Rob Currier, and the others dashed out of the stable, clad (in their own estimation) in blue coats and brass buttons, we were to submit to arrest *ad libitum*.

But after we had been dragged in and confined in cells a dozen or twenty times, it began to pall, even on the policemen.

It had long ago become sickeningly familiar to us.

To give the thing variety, new victims must be found. We were weary of the business and had ceased to feel any ter-

ror at the prospect of confinement. We never served terms longer than thirty seconds, for we had to be released immediately in order to be arrested once more. With only two criminals in the world, the policeman's lot became a tedious one. Both prisoners and police felt that unless something happened the stable could no longer a prison make, nor wooden stalls a cage.

Peter proposed to reform the whole thing. He boldly suggested that we go outside our own circles and arrest the Irish boys, — those who went in the winter to the parochial school. It would have to be done with all the majesty of the law, and that required a billy for each policeman.

These were duly made out of broomsticks. With great pains a hole was burned through the top of each with a red-hot poker. Then a cord was passed

through the hole, so the billy might be dangled and swung.

We were now ready for the prisoners, and our first campaign was all that the heart could wish. We waylaid a group of boys, and, without much struggle, soon had a prisoner in each cell. After a little we let them go.

They hurried off, remarking that they would get even with us.

These wholesale arrests were continued for two or three days, and all went happily. It was not until a week afterward that the reckoning came. Then a crowd of the outraged prisoners found Ed Mason and me alone, fell upon us, and beat us full sore. Without the whole force of police our authority had waned, and once again it became apparent that humiliation was ever our fortune in feats of arms.

It was this last straw that led to our

singular revolt on the day of the famous cowboy and Indian raid. We outraged all the proprieties, turned against the white man, and showed a criminal disregard for the cause of civilization. But for once victory rested with us. We plucked success out of failure, and found that it was good. When we had it, we declined to let it go. Force of arms had decided the issue, and we accepted its arbitrament. Argument could not move us. The worm turned, and the turning of him was terrible.

A hot and languorous day in August saw the great battle of redskins and pale-faces. Nothing in the weather stirred us to mighty deeds. The long afternoon had dragged on to half-past four. For two hours we had roamed the street, the gardens, and back yards. A dulness settled over things. The phoebe-bird who sat on Mr. Hawkins's woodshed reit-

crated his dismal note, as though the weariness of the dog-days had entered his very soul.

“Phe-e-e — be-e-e-e,” he remarked, with that falling inflection on the last syllable that would dampen the spirits of a circus clown.

“Phe-e-e — be-e-e.”

Mr. Hawkins himself leaned over his gate and smoked his pipe. An ice-cart came lumbering down the street. That, at least, was interesting. We hurried to meet it, and each possessed himself of a lump of ice. Then we perched, some on my fence and some on the blue box that held the garden hose. We removed the straw and sawdust from the ice, and began to suck it.

Mr. Hawkins, having taken his clay pipe from his mouth, engaged in a conversation with the driver of the ice-cart on the prospects of rain. We watched

them languidly. They debated the question at length, until the dripping water from the ice-cart had formed three dark spots in the dusty street.

Peter Bailey said: "Let's go up to Davenport's and see if the raft is there."

Davenport's was a general term used to describe a field, and a pond in that field. The pond was a small affair, with no large amount of water, but a great deal of black mud. It was not without certain tremendous fascinations, however, for we believed that in one place it had no bottom.

Moreover, leeches abounded.

Few, if any of us, had ever seen a leech; but we were aware that if one of them attached himself to the human body, no power under Heaven could drag him off, and he would not stop his infernal work until he had drained away every drop of blood.

Ed Mason and I had other reasons than the leeches for not wanting to experiment with the raft at Davenport's. Only a week before we had been capsized from that raft. We had not found the bottomless spot, nor been attacked by leeches; but we had crawled ashore in such a condition of muddiness that our reception at our respective homes had been depressing. Davenport's could get along without us for a while.

Peter's suggestion fell flat. Just then Charley Carter caught sight of a spare piece of clothes-line in my side yard. He ran and seized it, shouting "Lassos!"

It was a happy idea. The boundless West, the prairies, herds of buffaloes, roving Indians, cowboys — these were the visions that excited us in an instant, especially the cowboys.

What a life is theirs — to gallop forever with cracking revolvers and whirling



lassos; to capture the mighty buffalo, and bring down the hated Indian!

Why should we not do that?

Mr. Hawkins, next door, might continue to smoke his pipe to the monotonous song of the phoebe. For us, the career of danger far beyond the Mississippi; the life that knows no fear on the wind-swept prairie!

A lack of any more rope in my yard, and my firm refusal to have the clotheslines cut down entire, made us depart to Bailey's stable, where desperate enterprises were set on foot.

We made the lassos and drew upon our armory for wooden revolvers. These are thoroughly satisfactory weapons if you wave them in the air and shout "Bang!" at frequent intervals.

But immediately Peter Bailey's genius for military organization asserted itself. He and Rob Currier, the two Carters,

and Horace Winslow would be the cowboys. The hostile Indians must be impersonated, of course, by Ed Mason and myself. What was the sense of having cowboys without Indians for them to destroy?

So we should have no lassos, nor yet revolvers, but only tomahawks.

Right here I drew the line.

Ed backed me up, and we announced our ultimatum. Indians we would be, and lassiless we would go, but to ask us to refrain from carrying revolvers was demanding too much. We stuck out for revolvers, and intimated that a refusal would cause us to withdraw from all operations that afternoon.

So the concession was made.

Even then we knew that the adventure could end in only one fashion. We should be chased, hunted down, shot, lassoed, scalped, and finally burned at the

stake, during an imposing war-dance; for these cowboys were fully enamored of Indian methods of warfare when turned against the Indians themselves.

We were to belong to a dangerous tribe, recently discovered by Peter Bailey, and called *Sigh-ux*. We agreed to start on our barbaric career from the stable. From there to the street corner we should have full license to pillage and destroy. In order to give the avenging cowboys due provocation, we were to commit certain outrages on the way. These might include burning down the Universalist Church on the corner and ringing the door-bell at Miss Whipple's private school.

Once we had turned into Oak Street, where I lived, we would have to look to our safety. The cowboys would be on our track.

So off we went.

In a few moments, ignited by shots from our revolvers, the Universalist Church was wrapped in flames. We rang Miss Whipple's door-bell, and, as an additional atrocity, threatened her cat with tomahawks. Then we turned up Oak Street, and knew in a moment, by the yells that arose, that the cowboys had burst out of their encampment and were after us.

I suppose Ed shared my feelings of despair as we ran up the street. The youngest cowboy was two years older than either of us; they were all swifter runners, and they outnumbered us by three. In a few moments it would all be over. Our brief season of bloodshed and destruction was past, and it now only remained for us to be slaughtered at the cowboys' will.

It was so tiresome !

Our defeats at Bunker Hill, at Gettys-

burg, at Waterloo, and on countless other stricken fields recurred to us as we panted along. If we could only turn the tables in some way !

Instinctively we hurried toward the side yard of my house, climbed the fence, and tumbled over. We landed on the blue box that held the garden hose. The cowboys were approaching rapidly, with loud cries and much banging of revolvers. Already Horace Winslow was shouting that he had shot me five times, and that I must fall dead instantly. In a moment, we knew, they would be over the fence after us.

Moved by the same thought, we opened the blue box. The hose was connected with the tap at the side of the house. Ed turned the tap, while I, standing on the edge of the box and looking over the fence into the street, swept the road with a stream of cold water.

Horace stopped abruptly in his rush toward the fence, and Joe Carter, who had halted about thirty feet away to pour a volley of bullets after us, executed a swift movement to the rear.

The others paused where they were. Tomahawks, scalping-knives, spears, and revolvers — none of these would have checked the bold cowboys for a moment; but this stream of water was another matter.

It does not do for any cowboy, however desperate, to go home to his parents with his clothes soaking wet. Such events often mean an enforced retirement for a day from the field of glory.

“Whatcher doing?” screamed Peter Bailey. “That ain’t fair!”

We felt that he was right. This garden hose suddenly springing out of the Western prairie was a false note. Artistically it jarred. It was like bringing a school-teacher into fairyland.

But we did not stop the stream. For once we saw the militant Peter, his fearless lieutenant, Rob Currier, and all the rest of the ever victorious army held in check. No feeling that we were violating the fitness of things could detract from the sweetness of the moment. If eternal defeat had not embittered us in the past, we might have been more artistic and less human on this occasion. But in an instant, and as by direct intervention of the gods, our retreat had been turned into triumph, and that we did not intend to relinquish.

Woe, woe, to the vanquished !

"Aw, that's a *great* thing to do!" sneered Rob Currier.

"You *can't* do it!" shouted Joe Carter in a state of great excitement; "Indians don't have hose!"

"That's all right," I replied, "these Indians have got some. They got it

from a settler's cabin, or — or — or *somehow*. Anyhow, they've got it."

"But 'tain't fair," reiterated Peter Bailey.

" 'Tain't fair for five of you to be always masserkerin' us," remarked my fellow Indian.

Peter was disposed to bitterness. He did not enjoy having his military plans frustrated in such a manner.

"You're only a couple of babies, — you're afraid to be masserkered," he said.

Naturally, the babies invited him to come right on and do his massacring.

"I will, if you'll turn off that hose, — I don't want to get all wet."

"Course we won't turn it off, an' if you're afraid to come, why, you're beaten, an' you must surrender, an' be tomahawked, an' burned at the stake, an' have blazin' pine splinters stuck in your flesh. Will you do it?"



They firmly declined to become parties to any such attractive proceedings.

"Come on," said Joe Carter; "let 'em stay there and play with the hose. They don't know how to be Indians, anyway. We'll go back to the barn, and lasso buffaloes."

"Come on," said Peter, and the whole band of cowboys departed.

Then the victorious Indians, the two triumphant *Sigh-ux*, danced a short war-dance, and whooped two or three war-whoops, — so loud that Mr. Hawkins opened his gate, and came out to the sidewalk to see what was the matter.

## CHAPTER XIV

### WHEN MY SHIP COMES IN

ABOUT the middle of the month my family went to spend a week or two in a cottage at a neighboring beach. I enjoyed being at the sea-side, but I was hard up for playmates. For a few days there was a boy in the cottage next ours, and he spent most of his time riding around the veranda on a velocipede.

This made me feel that I needed a velocipede, too, and I suggested to my father that he supply my lack.

"You shall have one," he said, —  
"when my ship comes in."

I had never heard of the ship before — had never known that my father owned so much as a rowboat. But he had said

it himself — I was to have a velocipede “when his ship came in.” I tried to find out how soon he expected her, and where she was coming from. But he was hurrying away to take the train which carried him each day to the city, and I could get no particulars about his ship. He laughed, waved his hand, and was gone.

This left me rather dissatisfied, but I reflected, as I strolled around the veranda, that it was a good thing I had heard about this ship while we were living at the seashore. At home there was less opportunity to watch for ships. Here I saw dozens of them every day. Sometimes there would not be one in sight when I went to bed, but in the morning seven or eight would ride at anchor a mile or more from the beach.

Great steamers passed along, leaving a trail of smoke behind, and once or twice I had seen dainty yachts, glittering with

white paint and polished brass. Then heavy barges would go slowly by, pulled by puffing tugs. I had been told that they were loaded with coal, and I hoped that my father's ship was not one of them. If there was a velocipede for me on a barge, it would get black and sooty. I much preferred to have it come by one of the yachts — or, wait a moment — once there had swept by a fine three-masted schooner, her hull painted white and all her sails set. She was a beauty, and she looked big enough to sail around the world by herself. The yachts could hardly do that.

I decided that I would rather have my father's ship turn out to be a schooner like that white one.

By the time I had reached this decision I had come to the water's edge. It was a warm morning, and the sun, three or four hours high, sparkled on the ocean.

The waves broke, ran hissing up the beach, and retreated, leaving hundreds of little bubbling holes in the sand. I knew these holes — they were the dwellings of sand-fleas, who now were in a fair way of getting drowned out.

Farther up the beach, out of danger from the waves, I came upon a large sand-flea hopping along energetically. I sat down to head him off, and find what he was about. With his hard-shelled and rounded back he looked like a small model of some prehistoric and armored monster — only he had two very mild blue eyes. As soon as I tried to intercept him with a piece of dried marsh-grass he put his head down and dug so vigorously that he was soon covered with sand.

His disappearance left me alone. It was a lonely place, that beach, for the peanut-man and the merry-go-round had not discovered it, and its only in-

habitants were a few cottagers, like our family, and the fishermen.

But I did not miss the crowd. A few minutes' walk farther down the beach brought me to a point of sand that ran out into the ocean for fifty or sixty yards at low tide. At the end it curved around and enclosed a small salt-water pond.

This was an enchanted spot.

In the first place, it was the very kind of a pond for "going in wading." That mysterious and dangerous thing called the undertow, which lived among the breakers, had no influence in these quiet waters. Then, along the edges could be found, more than anywhere else, all kinds of interesting shells and sea creatures. There were large white shells, well adapted for scooping holes in the sand, and smaller, roundish cockle-shells whose inmates were usually at home. When you picked up one of them the cockle retired

inside and drew a trap-door over the entrance.

There were starfish with waving tentacles, sand-dollars, and the empty shells of sea-urchins and razor-clams. The black and ominous-looking objects which I implicitly believed to be sharks' eggs were often found near the borders of that ocean pond, and horseshoe crabs crawled darkly beneath its surface or lay dry and deceased on the sand.

Some rocks, covered with seaweed, sheltered a colony of ordinary crabs — little ones, who scuttled away as you approached, and big, dignified, ferocious veterans, who looked up at you defiantly and blew a multitude of bubbles, though whether they did this through wrath and indignation, or merely with the conscious joy of the artist, I could never discover.

These rocks were also the haunt of sea-gulls, who took flight before you

could come close to them. The sandpipers were more neighborly, skipping along the beach in front of you, though even they were shy and wary.

The waves brought up many charming varieties of seaweed, red, green, and brown. Beautiful enough it looked in the water; the disappointment came when you took it out.

Besides all these living or growing things, each high tide cast up on the sands an assortment of fascinating objects — pebbles of odd shapes and colors, smooth bits of wood rounded by the waves, spindles and spools that had come down the river from the mills of far-away towns, and bottles which always looked as if they were going to contain a message from some ship-wrecked mariner — but never did.

And now the greatest delight of all had been added, for I could watch for my



father's ship to come in. It would naturally land there, I argued; while he was living at the seashore he would have it come as near as possible to his house. It might run right up to the beach; they would put out a gangplank and one of the sailors would wheel my velocipede ashore.

Then I could spend the day riding it around the veranda of our cottage.

Or perhaps the ship would not be able to come so close to the shore. It would anchor a mile or two out, and send a boat. The velocipede might get wet coming in an open boat that way, and, if it were made of iron, the water would rust it. I hoped they would know enough to cover it up before they started to row in to the beach.

There were certainly no ships in sight that I could believe were my father's. Two fishing schooners were riding at

anchor, and the smoke of a steamer showed on the horizon — that was all. I left the pond behind and walked out to the end of the little cape. At any moment my father's ship might come in sight, and it was surely well for me to be ready for her. The sailors would be glad to see me, for then they could hand over the velocipede, sail away again to wherever they came from, and get anything else my father might want.

Where *were* they coming from?

That was an interesting question. I could see no land out there, but I had been told that if a ship sailed straight ahead in that direction the first land reached would be Portugal.

"I wonder what kind of velocipedes they have in Portugal?"

I uttered this aloud, and I jumped when I heard a voice say :—

"What's that you are wondering?"

A man had walked up behind me. He was a stranger — a tall man, carrying his hat in his hand. He repeated his question, and I told him that I was wondering about the velocipedes in Portugal.

"Portugal — Portugal," he ruminated. "I've never been in Portugal. I've been near it, though. I've been in Spain. In fact, I own some property in Spain."

"Do you?" I queried in astonishment. "But you look like an American. And Portugal's right straight out there. Why didn't you go there first?"

"Well, I went another way, you see. And then the Spaniards are easier to get along with — they're better landlords."

"Can you talk Spanish?" I demanded.

"A little," he replied modestly; "enough to answer. Tell me about this velocipede of yours. How did it get to Portugal?"

"It didn't get there," I told him; "it's

coming from there. Or, anyhow, it's coming from somewhere. On my father's ship."

"Oh, your father has a ship, has he?"

"Yes. He told me this morning that I could have a velocipede when his ship came in."

He looked down at me seriously enough.

"I see. And so now you're waiting for his ship to come in."

"Yes."

There was a pause. Then he seemed struck by the appearance of my bare legs.

"What is the matter with your shins?" he asked.

"Mosquito bites," I replied briefly.

After another pause he said, gravely:

"Camphor is good for mosquito bites."

"Yes, I know. My mother puts it on every night."

I thought a moment, and then asked,

"Do they have mosquitoes in Spain?"

"Not on my estates," he assured me; "nothing unpleasant on them at all. But it's funny you should be here waiting for a ship to come in. For that's just what I am doing."

"Have you a ship?"

"One exactly like your father's."

"Do you know my father?"

"No, but I know his ship."

"Is it a three-masted schooner, painted white?"

"Why, it's white. I am not sure about the three masts. But it's white sure enough, all bright and shiny. So is mine. Most of 'em are."

"Do many people have ships?"

"Oh, yes, lots and lots. Some of them have velocipedes on board, and some have — oh, all kinds of things."

"What have you on yours?"

He eyed me again.

"You would laugh if I told you."

"No, I wouldn't either."

"Yes, you would."

"No, I wouldn't *either*," I insisted.

"Tell me what you've got on your ship."

"Promise you won't tell?" he asked.

"Yes, of course."

"Cross your throat?"

"Yes."

And I did so.

He bent down. "Well, then, it's a —"

He broke off and looked along the beach. I looked too, but saw nothing remarkable; only Miss Norton, who lived in the cottage next but one to ours. She had Boojum, the Nortons' bull terrier, on a leash. Boojum was pulling at the leash and dragging her along as usual, and she seemed to be quite out of breath when she reached the little sandy point.

My friend, the man, told me to come on, and hurried off to meet Miss Norton.

They shook hands and began to talk. I stood where I was and watched them. At last the man turned toward me and shouted:—

“Come on! Don’t you want to go for a walk? We’ll watch for your ship as we go.”

But I shook my head. I did not intend to be drawn from my vigil as easy as that. Miss Norton did not interest me particularly—I could see her any day.

The man was apparently glad to see her; they slipped Boojum’s leash, let him rush off by himself, and then started together along the sand.

He could not have had anything valuable on his ship, for he never glanced at the ocean at all.

I turned again to inspect the horizon, reflecting that it was quite different when you expected your ship to bring you a velocipede.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE LUCKY-BUG

AFTER all my waiting and watching I never saw the ship that fetched my velocipede. It came — during the night, I fancy — shortly after we got home from the beach.

But I had the velocipede, — that was the main thing. It was built mostly of wood, and painted red. On it, I spent four happy days, riding up and down the sidewalks of Oak Street.

Then, somehow, it got broken, and had to be sent away to be mended. This was distressing enough of itself. But it turned out to be the first of a veritable series of misfortunes.

On the same day that I broke the veloci-



pede, the cat made an attempt on the life of my sole surviving goldfish. She had been unsuccessful, I am glad to say, and she now had to disappear over the fence with more than her usual speed whenever I came out of the house. But in her efforts she had dislodged a pail of minnows that stood beside the goldfish's residence, and a quart or more of pond-water, with fifteen unfortunate minnows, had been deposited on my bed. I was not there to distress my eyes with their dying struggles, but the household authorities had made much of the incident, dwelling quite irrelevantly on the state of the bedclothes, rather than the fate of the minnows.

Consequently I was led to believe that any more minnows would be received into the house with a coolness bordering upon absolute inhospitality.

The shocking unreasonableness of this

attitude was perfectly plain to me, as I think it will be to any fair-minded person. I pointed out that neither I, nor the goldfish, nor the deceased minnows were in any degree to blame. Not the most biassed tribunal in the world, save one composed of feminine housekeepers, would ever think of finding guilty any party to the accident except the cat.

But did they so much as reprove *her*?

Not they.

She was a moth of peace, rusting in idleness under the kitchen stove or on the back fence, fat, lazy, and full of sin. Like all of her kind, she tempered a career of sloth with occasional deeds of cruelty and blood by day and with diabolical yells at night. Yet she was maintained, a favored pensioner, in the household, under the superstitious delusion that she caught mice, and she would have gone over to the neighbors any day if it had

struck her that they were more generous with rations than we were.

My estimate of her was formed the night I heard the screams of a nest of young robins in the apple tree, up which she had dragged her fat body, like an overfed snake, bent on slaughter. And nothing in the vast amount of misleading literature lauding her race has ever succeeded in whitewashing the character of the old reprobate.

The velocipede went away to be repaired, and the minnows departed this life on Monday. On Tuesday I broke the large blade of my jack-knife, and on Wednesday fell in with three boys from the parochial school, who still recalled with animosity their captivity in Peter Bailey's stable.

It was three against one, and I emerged from the encounter with very little glory, a good deal of dust on my clothes, and

two or three rather lame spots on my person.

Beyond argument, I had somehow got into disgrace with fortune and men's eyes. At this rate, unless the gods were propitiated, it seemed unlikely that I should survive until the end of the week.

What could I do to win fortune back? Some great stroke was evidently necessary. Ever since Monday, the day of the first catastrophes, I had carefully dropped stones down the culvert under the railway track every time I passed.

Nothing at all had come of it.

Yet it is, as every one knows, a very potent charm indeed. To all who doubt I have only to say that Charley Carter, after dropping stones in the culvert three or four times a week for two years, had, one day, *only an hour and a half* after dropping a stone, found eleven cents (two

nickels and a copper) down in Market Square. But it did not work with me.

Billy Mason, an unquestioned authority in all such matters, advised the capture of a Lucky-bug. That was his recipe, delivered when the shades of Wednesday evening were drawing in. And now behold me, in the bright sunlight of Thursday morning, anxiously following the movements of a large Lucky-bug, who was sliding merrily over the surface of the frog pond.

He darted swiftly about on the water, making two little ripples that broadened to the right and left behind him. His neat, dark, gentleman-like coat was slightly glossy, catching the sunshine in one tiny bright spot on his back. Ten or a dozen inches he would slide in one direction, looking always like the tip of an arrow-head whose sides were formed by the ripples he made.

Then he would shoot off abruptly at right angles, halt again, and change his course once more. There was no method in his actions; no vulgar pursuit of food.

The swallows, who in ceaseless parabolas soared, swept, and fluttered over that end of the pond, had a very practical purpose, however charming their flight might appear. They were gathering a comfortable meal of gnats and mosquitoes.

But the Lucky-bug, so far as I could see, was in it merely for the fun of the thing. Why toil and fuss about breakfast on a fine morning of summer? Much pleasanter to skim over the water, mindful only of the waving branches of the great elms overhead and the grassy bankings dotted with the yellow blossoms of the arnica.

That was his philosophy, I thought, and I sympathized with it. But I realized that it was not for me. The grinding

cares of life oppressed me, and left no time for idle amusement. My needs had driven me forth with a glass fruit-jar filled with water, and I must capture that Lucky-bug. He might continue his antics, but it must be in the narrow, circumscribed limits of the fruit-jar; not on the surface of the frog pond.

That good luck would attend me if I could catch him, I had no manner of doubt. Billy Mason had cited specific instances of the extreme felicity of those who caught and held these small black water-beetles, and Jimmy Toppan reënforced Billy's thesis by relating that it was only four months after *he* had caught a Lucky-bug that his father had bought him a Shetland pony.

The possession of a pony was beyond my utmost hopes, but I did pray, at least, that when I had attained a Lucky-bug the misfortunes which had assailed me

during the last three days might come to an end. Indeed, at that moment of desperation, fresh from my unhappy meeting with the parochial school boys, I would have gladly foregone any future pony for the mere privilege of being let alone by whatever malign deity it was that seemed bent on pestering me.

The Lucky-bug sailed warily about, never coming within easy reach. Evidently he had noticed me and my fruit-jar. If I had brought a net, his capture would have been easy, but the authorities held that he ought to be seized with the hand. Otherwise, the charm might fail.

I observed him in silence, and at last was glad to see that his motions were bringing him nearer the shore. He darted in and out, but, on the whole, came gradually within reach.

I leaned forward over the water, my hand outstretched.



Another swift movement brought him nearer me. Evidently he had decided that I was not a hostile object. His trustfulness was going to get him into trouble. Still another slide toward me, and I made a quick grab at him.

But he was quicker. He seized a tiny bubble — where he got it, I could not see — and dived like a flash, carrying the bubble with him. It was evidently his air supply, or else for illuminating purposes, — I could not be sure which, but he looked like a diver carrying an electric searchlight.

Once he reached the bottom — it was only about six inches distant there at the edge of the pond — he became invisible among the pebbles and bits of wood. I groped about, but could not dislodge him.

So I drew back and waited. In a few moments he came to the surface again, a

yard or two to the left. I made ready to snatch at him once more, but he was plainly cautious now, for he went below with his bubble before I had any chance of getting him.

I decided to look for another Lucky-bug with less suspicion in his character, and I set out to stroll around the pond.

A little farther along I found two or three toads, — meditating, apparently, near the edge of the water. I reflected on the unfairness of calling that pond after the gay and handsome frog when it was almost exclusively occupied by that more sedate and useful citizen, the toad. That was the way of the world as it seemed to me on that morning. The frog had a smart coat, his carriage was jaunty, and his movements nimble. Also was he an expert swimmer. When you had said that about him you had said all.

Nobody liked the toad's appearance;

his progress on land was lumbering, to say the least, and no one thought of going to him for swimming lessons. With him swimming was a duty during certain weeks of the year. With the frog it was an art and a joy forever. But did the frog ever contribute to the happiness of the world as the toad had been doing but a few weeks earlier?

I think not.

The toad had not only the nightingale's eyes; he had, during those early spring months, the other gift of the nightingale as well. Had not all heard him on the mild evenings when, with his throat swelled out, he trilled love songs that made the whole pond musical? And did any one give him credit?

No; they said, "Hear the *frogs* singing!"

Musing thus on the black injustice of things, I circled the pond and came again

to the haunt of the original Lucky-bug. There he was, or his twin, skimming about as before. I approached, stooped over, reached out my hand, and grabbed.

*I had him!*

He was instantly in the fruit-jar, where he seemed perfectly contented, sailing and diving as if he were on the pond.

I walked home triumphant. Did my luck change? Can you ask the question? I do not want to make the case too strong, for my attitude is that of the scientific investigator. So I will mention only two of the events that followed the capture of that Lucky-bug.

And mind, please, that both of them occurred on that same Thursday.

*On my way home*, I found the works of an old alarm clock which somebody had abandoned. The cover, face, and bell were gone; but you could still wind it up and make a delightful whirring

sound, calculated to distract all grown-ups.

That was not all.

When I got home, I found that there was to be blueberry pudding for dinner — and my brother was gone for the day!

## CHAPTER XVI

### WEST INJY LANE

EVERY one called it "West Injy Lane," but some of the property holders had put up a sign-post with the words, "Washington Avenue."

There was never a Washington Avenue which looked so little like one. A pleasant old road, — it had not greatly changed its appearance since the day when the man for whom it had been renamed passed by. It meandered along, innocent of sidewalks, and bordered, right and left, with grass. A pond at one end was musical all the spring and summer, — first with the high notes of the "peepers," then with the soprano trilling of

toads, and finally with the gruff performances of basso-profundo bullfrogs.

Cows and sheep nibbled the grass at the sides of the road, or grazed in the meadows beyond the stone walls. There were only five or six farm-houses throughout the mile and a half of the lane, and their barns stood open all summer, while the swallows flashed in and out. Solemn files of white ducks waddled down to the pond, where they spread devastation among the minnows and polliwogs, and then waddled contentedly back again, clapping their yellow bills as if smacking their lips. Their bills and feet gleamed in the sunlight.

It does not seem that any kind of weather but bright sunshine ever prevailed in West Injy Lane. Certainly, Ed Mason and I did not see how it could be improved. At one end, near the pond, was the country grocery where you

could get weighed on the scales, and buy jumbles (shaped like an elephant) at two for a cent. Near the other end was Haskell's Field, — a hallowed spot, for it always contained one or two grass-covered rings, the relics of circuses past and the promise of circuses to come.

Midway between the two, and in front of one of the houses, was a gigantic and half-ruined elm, already celebrated in legend and verse. Its romantic story never impressed us, except to make me wonder how it happened that when the young man had stuck a willow branch into the ground in front of his sweetheart's dwelling, an elm tree should have sprouted therefrom.

"'Twasn't a willow," said Ed Mason, as we walked through the lane one morning, "'twas a piece of elm."

"'Twas a willow," I retorted.

"How do you know?"



“’Cos Charley Carter told me.”

“He don’t know anything ’bout it.”

“Yes, he does, too! Fred Noyes told him, and Peter Bailey told *him*, and Cap’n Bannister told *him*.”

Ed was silent.

The name of Captain Bannister was potent. He lived in a house on this very lane, — a small, red-faced man with black hair. He had been a sailor, it was said, but he was a farmer now, so far as he had any occupation at all. He had no family and no servants, and he dwelt alone with a fluctuating number of cats.

His house was painted white, — spotless and shining. It was without blinds, and so dazzling as to make you sneeze when you looked at it. The path up to his front door was lined, not with the usual white-washed rocks, but with large white sea-shells from some foreign country. Back of these were double rows of

cinnamon pinks, the Captain's joy and pride.

Once I had been taken by my elders to call on Captain Bannister. He showed us around his house, — a museum of curiosities. But of all the stuffed birds, all the spiny and prickly fishes, all the curious bits of coral and wooden ships somehow stuffed into glass bottles, — none had seemed so interesting as a small box filled with what the Captain assured me was "tooth-powder from China." That the Chinese should know and use a pink substance so much like that with which I had to struggle every morning seemed to me nothing less than marvellous.

The fact had another aspect as well, — it robbed foreign travel of one of its charms. If one could wander so far and still be pursued by enervating domestic customs, one might as well stay at home.

Why subject yourself to the dangers of the deep if liberty fled always before your coming ?

One room in the Captain's house gave me a fright. It was a small, dark apartment, a closet for size. In it the owner had chosen to place four or five lay figures in old-fashioned garments. They had dried pumpkins for heads and they sat in ghostly silence amid the gloom. There was a man with a pipe in his mouth sitting in front of an empty fireplace, an old woman, and two or three children. There was even a baby in a cradle, — its yellow, pumpkin face looking out from a ruffled cap.

I did not linger there.

Ever since that visit the silent family had haunted my dreams, and I more than half suspected that Captain Bannister would like to lock me up in the room with them. I did not know what ad-

vantage he would get by such an action, but its possibility seemed very near.

Even on the bright morning that Ed Mason and I, walking through West Injy Lane engaged in a discussion about the old tree — even then, to me the Captain's house was an eerie place.

There was no reason — aside from the pumpkin family — why it should be so. It glistened with all its usual brightness, and there was the owner himself puttering about in the little garden. Ed Mason walked up to the picket fence, bold as a lion, and addressed the captain in an easy, conversational tone.

“Good mornin’, Cap’n Bannister!”

The sailor faced about.

“Hullo, boys! Won’t yer come in? . . . Yer needn’t be afraid, I won’t hurt yer.”

This last was for my benefit; I had not shown as much readiness to enter the gate as had my companion.

"Come right in."

So I went in. The next remark of the old man did much to put everything on an agreeable footing.

"Do you boys like peaches?"

We did like peaches, and we said so.

"Well, just wait till I pull up two or three of these plantains, an' we'll go round to the side of the house an' see if there's any on the tree. . . . There . . . now come on."

We followed him around the corner of the house. A black cat with a white breast came running to meet his master.

"Hullo, here's Nickerdemus; I told him to watch the peaches. Did yer keep the bees away, Nickerdemus?"

Nicodemus yawned and gave every sign of having been asleep, after the manner of his kind when there is no personal advantage in keeping awake.

The captain put a ladder against the

tree, climbed up, and began to drop peaches to us. Until then I had a faint suspicion that he might be merely luring us on and on toward the room where sat the pumpkin family. But all such suspicions vanished now. You cannot think ill of a man who gives you peaches like those.

Ed Mason intended to find out about the old elm tree, and he broached the subject fearlessly.

"Cap'n, Sam says that *you* said they planted a piece of willow where the old elm came up."

"What's that? No; they didn't plant no willow, but all this about the young feller that came callin' on his girl, an' cut a stick to keep off the dogs, an' stuck the stick in the ground in front of her door, an' then went away an' forgot it, an' the tree grew outer that stick, — all that's bosh. Don't yer believe it."

We promised not to believe it. The captain came down the ladder with two more peaches, which he passed over to us. He stood, watching us eat them, and enlarged on the subject of the tree.

"I know all 'bout it, 'cos my second cousin, Silas Winkley, lived there, an' his great-gran'father planted that there tree jus' like any other tree. Silas's great-gran'father, ol' Deacon Plummer, wa'n't callin' on any girls there, 'cos he was up'ards of seventy when he planted the tree, an' had children an' gran'-children of his own. These here poems is all cat's-foot-in-yer-pocket!"

We did not know exactly what that meant, but it seemed to cast some doubt on the truth of the legend, at any rate.

"Silas Winkley," ruminated the Captain, "thought he was a sailor. He went two or three v'yges with ol' Dick Cutter an' fin'lly he got Melvin Bailey, — gran'-

father of *this* Melvin that's alive now, to give him command of a ship. I've heard my father tell 'bout it lots of times, — he was second mate. She was the *Nanny Karr*, — spelt it with a K, they did then. Well, Silas took her down as fur as Nantucket all right, — hee, hee, hee!"

Here Captain Bannister paused and chuckled for a few moments.

"Yes, siree, he got her down there without no difficulties, — hee, hee, hee! an' then he run her plumb on to the south side of the island. In a dead ca'm, mind yer, an' on a night as clear as a whistle. The crew all went ashore, — they could a dropped off'n her bows on to land without wettin' their feet a'most, an' the next mornin' Silas went aboard ag'in to git his wife's knittin'-needles, — his wife was along with him."

The captain paused again to choke and wheeze.



“Well, in a day or two there come a high tide, an’ they got whale-boats, an’ hawsers, an’ some fellers on the island, an’ they got her off all right, — she wa’n’t no ways hurt in the sand, an’ they went on their way rej’icin’, — ’cept Melvin Bailey, who had had a hunderd an’ forty dollars of his forked out to the fellers with the whale-boats. However, he didn’t know nothin’ ’bout this till months arterwards. Silas set out ag’in, he was bound for Fayal, — d’yer know where Fayal is ?”

We were silent, till at last I suggested :

“It’s in Spain, I mean Portugal, isn’t it ?”

“Now look at that ! I betcher when I was your age there wa’n’t any boy in *this* town that didn’t know Fayal. It’s one o’ the Azores, an’ some ways this side of Spain or Portugal either. Well, Silas was bound for Fayal, but he had

the most terrible luck you ever see. Fust, he run into a gale and got drove way south of the Capes. When he wrote back to Melvin Bailey 'bout this gale he said that the seas run tremenjuss high, an' that the ship was put into great jeopardy. Well, Melvin wa'n't what yer call a very edjicated man, an' he got down his atlas an' — hee, hee, hee ! an' tried to find Great Jeopardy ! Hee, hee, hee !”

I thought I was not appreciating the joke to its utmost, so I inquired politely :

“Where *is* Great Jeopardy, Cap'n ?”

“It ain't nowhere, son. That's just the pint of the hull thing, — there ain't no such place ! ‘Jeopardy’ means *danger*, an' all Silas meant was that, owin' to the gale, the ship was put into danger,— hee, hee, hee ! I s'pose Melvin thought 'twas one of them islands like the Lesser Antilles, or some of *them*.”

This time Ed Mason and I could join in Captain Bannister's mirth. The captain, still chuckling, led the way across the yard and sat down on the stone doorstep, warm in the noon sunshine. Ed and I perched on a grass banking beside him to hear the further adventures of Silas Winkley.

"Well, Silas he kep' havin' bad luck. His fust mate, Andy Spauldin', was took down sick pretty soon with yaller janders, an' that left Silas an' my father to navigate the ship. It was my father's fust v'yge as an officer, an' I guess he wa'n't no great shakes navigatin', — though he was most as good as Silas was, at that."

"In 'bout two weeks they made what Silas thought was Fayal. Silas sailed into harbor as proud as Nebberkernezzar, when one of the men come up an' says, says he, 'That ain't Fayal, Cap'n,' but

Silas told him to shut his mouth, he guessed he knew where he was without no Joppa clam-digger tellin' him his business. Yer see Silas he was born over to Ipswich, an' terrible proud of it, — I dunno why. But after he'd come to anchor, an' he'd got on his shore clothes, he got into the boat an' went ashore. It didn't take him long to find out that the feller was right; it wa'n't Fayal, it wa'n't even one of the Azores, he hadn't made no east'ard at all, — hee, hee, hee! Hee, hee, hee! It was — hee, hee, hee!”

The captain's laughing was so prolonged this time, he was so doubled up with excruciating merriment as to cause us some anxiety. He coughed and strangled, and his usually red face became deep purple. Finally he managed to control himself enough to gasp faintly:—

"It was one of the *West Injies*! Yes-sir, Silas had sailed pretty nigh due south after the gale was over, an' here he was on one of the West Injy Islands. I dunno what one: my father said Silas wouldn't never tell 'em, though *he* reckoned it might 'a' been Cubia. Joe Noyes was in the crew, an' he said it was further to the east'ard than Cubia, but it was one of the West Injies all right. The story got out, of course, when the *Nanny* got back here, an,' when Silas come down to live on this lane with his mother's folks, — for Melvin Bailey didn't ask him to command no more ships, — why then they began to call this West Injy Lane. That wa'n't its name, — 'twas Plummer's Lane, but folks has called it West Injy Lane ever since, — 'cept these cotty-dummers that want it called Washington Avenue. Yessir, that's the way it happened."

And then the captain added, somewhat irrelevantly :—

“So yer see I know all 'bout that tree, an' yer don't want to believe any of them poets !”

## CHAPTER XVII

### THEIR UNACCOUNTABLE BEHAVIOR

My orders were explicit.

I was to take a note up to the Bigelow's house on Elm Street, and I was to give the note to Miss Carew. There was no answer. After delivering the note I might do as I pleased, but I must not be late for dinner.

The member of my family who issued these directions was one with whom it paid to keep on good terms. I might have felt grieved about this errand on such a morning, but I had already found that Jimmy Toppan and Ed Mason had departed from their homes on some private mission which did not seem to include me. Bereft of playmates I had

spent a lonely half-hour in the side yard, blowing on blades of grass, and raising fiendish shrieks therewith. So my employment on business which would send me far from home was mutually agreeable. I had only one request to make.

"Can I go on my velocipede?"

"Yes; but don't go too fast and get overheated, and don't lose the note."

The prohibition about going too fast was superfluous. The velocipede had tires which were but bands of iron. Progress upon it, over the uneven brick sidewalks, was slow and not altogether painless. The pedals (they looked like large spools) were attached at such an angle that a thrilling speed was hard to attain.

But to me, as I rode it along the pleasant, shaded sidewalks of Elm Street on that morning, it was a chariot of joy.

Naturally, I paused for a moment at



Mr. Hawkins's gate to exchange salutations with that gentleman. Mr. Hawkins did not believe that it would rain: though it might. Fortified with this information, I continued past Jimmy Toppan's house, past the frog pond and the school. I proceeded at a moderate rate, — not over three-quarters of a mile an hour. At the street crossings, paved as they were with cobblestones, it was, on the whole, easier to dismount and wheel my velocipede.

When I reached Higginson's toy-shop I stopped again, flattened my nose against the window, and observed the condition of the market. There had been a sharp break in marbles, evidently, — they were now offered at fifteen for a cent. Return-balls remained firm, however; and tops had advanced. After I had noted these facts, and concluded, further, that some one had, since yester-

day, purchased two of the five sticks of striped candy from the glass jar in the window, I continued on my journey.

Fifteen minutes later I reached the Bigelow house, — a square, three-storied residence set a little back from the street. The front door was open, and you could look right through the broad, cool hall, through a back door, and down the garden path. Everything about the house was big, and quiet, and cool, and there was no one to be seen, and no sign of any one, — except for a tall bicycle which stood at the curb-stone.

I knew that bicycle: it belonged to a neighbor of mine, — Mr. Dennett. He was a grave, elderly man of nearly twenty-one years. Before him I stood in speechless awe. Most of the time, except in summer, he was away at a place called Harvard, which drew many of his kind.

In summer he, with others like him, rode about on bicycles, and did various interesting things. Often they played tennis at a place farther up Elm Street. Sometimes, on these occasions, Ed Mason and I had been allowed to stand outside the high wire nets, and fetch back balls when they were knocked into the street, — a privilege which we especially esteemed.

The balls were of the most fascinating kind imaginable: they would bounce to a tremendous height, and it was rumored that they cost thirty cents apiece.

I wondered why Mr. Dennett was at the Bigelows'.

However, there was my note to deliver. I left my red velocipede standing beside the enormous bicycle, and rang the front door-bell. After a long wait, a very red-faced, cross-looking woman — not Mrs. Bigelow at all — came to the door.

"A letther fer Miss Keroo? Well, ye'd betther be afther takin' it to her yersilf. She's out in the garrden, there. An' no more time have I to waste in runnin' fer this bell ivry foive minutes!"

And she went away, muttering. I was not surprised to see her so cross. They always were cross; it was their normal condition. I walked through the hall and took the garden path.

It was lined on both sides with box, and beyond were flower-beds. Also there were apple trees, and cherry trees, and peach trees,—the last full of red and yellow fruit. A number of bees were inquiring into the hollyhocks, and on a stalk of Canterbury bells sat a brown and black butterfly, slowly opening and closing his wings.

But I could not see Miss Carew. Near the foot of the garden the path was arched by a summer-house. Its latticed

sides were covered thick with clematis and trumpet-vine. I kept on down the path and walked into the summer-house.

There was a quick exclamation, and Miss Carew arose hastily from a seat in the corner. Mr. Dennett was sitting there, and he had a curious expression on his face, which made him rather more terrible to me than usual. Miss Carew, like the cross woman who had let me into the house, had very red cheeks. But in the case of Miss Carew the color was not permanent. It was more noticeable at this moment than I had ever seen it before ; but it did not last.

“Why, it’s Sammy !” said Miss Carew, with a laugh.

I disliked being called “Sammy” before Mr. Dennett, and I felt my face grow red also. I remembered that Miss Carew was a stranger, who had been visiting the Bigelows scarcely two months, but I corrected her just the same.

"*Sam*," I remarked, with dignity.

"*Sam*," she repeated apologetically.

Then I took the note out of my jacket pocket, and handed it to her. She thanked me, opened the envelope, and read the message. Then she said that it was "all right," and added that I was a good boy to bring the note.

Encouraged by this flattery, I backed to a bench on the other side of the summer-house, and sat down facing them. Miss Carew had seated herself again,—though at a somewhat greater distance from Mr. Dennett than before.

There was a slight pause.

Miss Carew asked me how I came,—had I walked all the way?

"No," I replied, "I rode my velocipede."

"Did you, really?" she said; "that's a long ride for you, isn't it?"

It interested me to hear Miss Carew

talk, — she came from some part of the country where they have a greater respect for the letter R than was usual with us. But I denied that I was fatigued.

“No’m; it ain’t far at all! Once,” I continued, growing reminiscent, “I rode nearly up to Chain Bridge!”

“Is that so?”

“Yes’m; but when I got up to the Three Roads, Mr. Titcomb came along, an’ said I’d better go back, — it was so hot.”

“Did you go back?”

“Yes.”

There was another silence, which Miss Carew again broke.

“What kind of a velocipede is yours?” she asked.

“A wooden one,” I assured her.

Then it struck me that the conversation was becoming a trifle inane, and I tried to make things more interesting.

"My velocipede is out in front of the house now, — you can come out and see it, if you want to."

But Miss Carew thought she would defer that pleasure till another time.

Mr. Dennett took the witness.

"Do you go to school, Sam?"

Really, it seemed that he might have done better than that. I had that question asked me about five hundred times a year by grown-ups. Evidently this Harvard was not the place I had thought. But I answered him.

"Not now : it's vacation."

"Yes, I know. But you go when it isn't vacation?"

"Oh, yes."

"What school, — the Jackman?"

"No ; the Kelley."

"Oh ! Whose room?"

"Last year I was in Miss Temple's, an' next I'll be in Miss Philipps's."



I had apparently satisfied Mr. Dennett's curiosity, for he relapsed into silence. There was a long pause, while I swung my legs, and looked at them expectantly. I was quite ready to answer more questions if they had them to put.

They did not seem to think of any point on which they required information for two or three minutes. Then Mr. Dennett did make an inquiry, — or, rather, a suggestion.

"Perhaps your mother may want you for something, Sam?"

But I was able to set his mind at rest instantly.

"Oh, no; she don't want me till one o'clock, an' it's only half-past ten, now."

"Later than that, isn't it?"

"No, sir. I saw the 'Piscopal clock when I came by."

He seemed to be relieved at this, but presently he had another question to ask :

"Do you care for blackberries, Sam?"

"Yes! Have you got any?"

"There are some down the hill, there, — against the fence. Why don't you go and get them?"

"Thank you, — shall I bring some of them back to you?"

"No, — just eat 'em yourself, and have a good time."

This was by far the most sensible thing he had said, and I hurried down to the blackberry bushes. But when I got to them, and inspected the long, thorny branches, I found that my expectations were to be disappointed. If there had been any good berries they had been picked. All that remained were unripe.

I hurried back to the summer-house, and burst in upon its occupants. They seemed to be having some kind of a misunderstanding: Miss Carew had a book

in her hands, which Mr. Dennett was trying to take from her.

"Hullo! Back already? What was the matter with the blackberries, — are they green?"

"No," I replied, "they are red, — but they're red when they're green, you know."

And I climbed back to my former place on the bench opposite them. Immediately, Mr. Dennett became concerned about my velocipede.

"Did you leave your velocipede in the street, Sam? Aren't you afraid some one will steal it?"

I laughed.

"Oh, I guess not. I left it right beside your bicycle, an' there wouldn't any one dare to touch it, — would they, Miss Carew?"

The lady agreed that it would require great boldness, but still, she thought, it

might be well for me to go and see if it were safe.

To allay her uneasiness I went back as far as the house, and looked through the hall. Both the machines were there, in perfect safety. I returned to the summer-house, and reported the fact, pleased at being able to tell my friends that they need not worry.

As I was climbing to my seat again, Mr. Dennett had another suggestion.

“Look here, Sam, we saw a squirrel in Mr. Moulton’s trees when we came out here. Don’t you want to go and see if you can find him?”

A squirrel is always worth seeing. I asked one or two questions concerning his whereabouts, and then departed, promising to return as soon as I found him. Mr. Moulton’s trees were many, and after I had gone through the hole in the hedge, I instituted a careful inspection of each tree.

Mr. Moulton came down the drive, and when I told him what I was looking for, he joined in the hunt. I can truthfully say that we examined each branch with care.

But no squirrel appeared at all, though we saw three blackbirds, and plenty of robins. When I got back to the summer-house Miss Carew and Mr. Dennett were both gone, although they had left the book behind. I searched and called, but could not find them any more than I had found the squirrel.

As I departed down Elm Street again on my velocipede, I thought the matter over at some length. Mr. Dennett had not left the premises, unless he had done so without his bicycle, for that remained where I had first seen it.

There was something singular about their behavior. Had they, perchance, picked all the ripe blackberries before I

arrived, and had they been trying, with so much artifice, to conceal that fact from me ?

That was the most reasonable explanation I could devise, — and, certainly, the circumstances demanded some kind of explanation.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE SIEGE OF AUNTIE MERRILL

It was Peter Bailey who organized the siege. We had long ago made up the quarrel that arose on the day of the Indian raid. He still maintained that Ed's and my conduct had been contrary to all rules of warfare, but we noticed that we were not expected, since that day, to impersonate the under dog in every combat.

Peter's reputation for generalship was a little tarnished, and for that reason he got up this grand military movement against the property and person of Auntie Merrill.

That lady had, so Peter said, certain

"distressed damsels" closely immured in dungeons beneath her house.

"Distressed *what?*" asked Ed Mason.

"Damsels," replied Peter.

"What d'ye mean, — *girls?*"

"Well, — yes."

"I don't want 'em," rejoined the practical Ed; "let 'em stay there."

Peter was exasperated.

"Why, we've *got* to get them out," he asserted, "or they'll starve to death."

"How'd they get in there?" Ed Mason wished to know.

"What difference does that make? She captured 'em, I s'pose."

I thought I could throw a little light on this dark subject. It was Monday morning, and I had been looking over the fence into the Merrill garden only half an hour before.

"There ain't any distressed damsels there, Peter," I said earnestly; "I saw



'em. One of 'em's Katie Clancy, — an' she lives there all the time, an' the other is Mrs. Muldoon, an' she's hangin' out the wash."

But I was unmercifully snubbed for my pains.

"You make me perfectly tired," he retorted. "I don't mean Katie, nor Mrs. Muldoon. I know them. The — er — damsels are in dungeons below the ground."

I turned to Rob Currier, Jimmy Toppan, and Horace Winslow, who had come into the Masons' back yard with Peter. But they had been under the influence of Peter's warlike mind and persuasive tongue for an hour or more. They seemed to believe in the damsels, and their confidence tended to shake my doubts.

Ed Mason was not so easily moved from scepticism.

"What are they doin' there?" he inquired.

"Doin'? They ain't doin' anything, you chump! They're chained hand an' foot to the rock. How could they do anything? They're waitin' for us to rescue 'em."

"Why don't they call a p'liceman?"

"'Cos they can't! How could they call so he'd hear through the rock?"

"Did Auntie Merrill put 'em in there?"

"Yes; she did, — or some of her murmurmons."

"Her what?"

Horace Winslow broke into the conversation.

"Don't you know what murmidons are? They're big woolly elephants with long tusks."

"Oh, get out! Auntie Merrill hasn't got any. You think you're stuffin' me, but you ain't!"

Peter seemed to be willing to change the subject, and get on to the main issue.

"We'll divide into two regiments, — I'll take command of one, and Rob of the other. I'll take Horace and Sam, and Rob can take Ed Mason and Jimmy. We'll stay here, an' you can go down into Sam's yard an' climb over the fence, an' go up by the path next the Nortons' house. Then we'll attack the house from two sides at once. Now, go on, Rob."

But this was going altogether too fast for me.

"How'll we get by Mrs. Muldoon? She's out there on the clothes-jack now."

"That'll be all right," Peter assured me; "if she says anything, just knock her down!"

But I could not imagine myself knocking Mrs. Muldoon down under any circumstances. In the first place, she weighed over two hundred pounds.

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"An' say," continued Ed Mason, "how are we goin' to attack the house when we get there? What'll we do?"

Even Jimmy Toppan was wavering.

"Where are the murmidons? What'll we do if we meet them?" he asked.

Such questions were quite appropriate. We had long been accustomed to scout on Auntie Merrill, as well as other more formidable persons. We had tracked her up and down her garden many times, peered at her from behind bushes, and observed her from the tops of trees. But Peter, filled with a longing for military glory and daring deeds, was proposing an exploit altogether more hazardous than anything we had ever attempted. Thirsting for conquest, he overlooked all obstacles. He had, however, failed to infect us with his enthusiasm.

For one thing, this inhuman treatment

of the damsels seemed rather foreign to Auntie Merrill's character, as I knew it. It was true she had spoken to me with severity on one occasion, — something about running across her new grass plot, and she had warned me against throwing stones at the statue of George Washington near her house. The latter warning had been totally unnecessary, — I had never dreamed of doing such a thing. I never had, that is, until she put the idea into my head, — after that it appealed to me with the fearful fascination of a deadly crime.

I was somewhat afraid of her, but it was nevertheless hard to think of her keeping these unfortunate creatures chained up and starving. Moreover, to make an open attack upon her house by force of arms (Peter had served out wooden revolvers to us, and had a sword for himself) was a serious business. It

struck me that we might get involved with the police. In the first place, the attack carried with it the possible necessity of an assault and battery upon Mrs. Muldoon, a perfectly respectable and very muscular washerwoman.

Then, supposing that we had overcome that difficulty, there was the house to enter.

Who could say that the doors might not be locked?

Finally, there were these mysterious and terrible "murmidons." No one, not even Peter, seemed to be able to say exactly what they were, or tell at what moment we might be confronted by them.

Altogether, I have seldom engaged in any military enterprise where the obstacles seemed so overwhelming, and the chances of success so slight.

But Peter would hear of no objections.

If we did not wish to embroil ourselves

with Mrs. Muldoon, it would be a simple matter to keep behind the hedge until we were between her and the house. Then it would be too late for her to make any effective resistance.

As for the locked doors, — beat 'em down !

He would take care of the “murmi-dons” himself, — leave them to him.

We were quite willing to do so.

But even at this last moment, when our general thought he had arranged everything, and as he was about to issue his orders once more to Colonel Currier, there came a hitch.

“Well, say, look here. What are we goin’ to do with these damsels when we get 'em ?”

It was still Mason, the unconvinced, who spoke.

“Don’t be such a jay ! We’ll send 'em home, of course !”

"Where do they live?"

Peter fairly danced with rage.

"How do I know where they live? We can ask 'em, can't we?"

"I s'pose we can. But how are you goin' to get their chains off? You said they were chained to the rock."

The general had to assume more responsibility for himself.

"I'll get 'em off all right. Now, I do wish you'd go ahead an' start, an' shut up your talkin'. Rob, you whistle as soon as you get back of the quince bush, an' we'll come right over the fence here, an' both regiments must charge up to the house at the same time. But don't start till I give the order to charge."

Rob Currier, Ed, and Jimmy disappeared behind Mr. Hawkins's woodshed. They had scarcely done so when Peter called them back.

"You must be sure to take Auntie Mer-



rill a prisoner," he commanded; "take her *alive*."

They promised not to let her escape. Then they set out once more. We climbed upon the fence, and watched for them to appear at the foot of the Merrill garden. Soon we saw them crossing my yard in Indian file. Rob mounted the fence, and looked over.

No enemy in sight.

Then all three climbed the fence, crouched behind the hedge, and crept up the path to the quince bush. Rob whistled.

As soon as he heard this signal, Peter ordered us into the hostile territory. We dropped silently over the fence, and lay flat on our stomachs in the grass. Peter raised himself slightly on his arms and gazed at the stronghold.

Mrs. Muldoon had gone into the house for more clothes-pins.

Now was our chance !

Peter rose, waved his sword, and was just opening his mouth to order the charge, when an unexpected thing happened.

Auntie Merrill opened a side door of her house, walked out on the veranda, descended two steps, and proceeded slowly up the side path to the street. She was dressed in black as usual, with a lavender bonnet, and she carried a little parasol. She opened the garden gate, crossed the sidewalk, stepped into a carriage that was standing by the curb, and drove quietly away.

The enemy had escaped.

We had been baffled without having a chance to strike a blow. But there were still the house and the damsels. Ought we not continue on our expedition ?

While we were considering this question, Katie Clancy appeared at a basement door, with a broom in her hand.

"Now, thin, clear outter here, ye little divils, or I'll be takin' the broom to ye!"

And she started on a frontal attack.

Peter was over the fence again in two seconds. Horace and I, like well-disciplined troops, did not let him precede us by more than an inch.

In a few moments the detachment under Rob Currier returned to headquarters.

Jimmy Toppan said:—

"Let's go down to Plumbush an' go in swimmin'."

"What's the matter with Four Rocks?" suggested Peter.

"Oh, come on to Plumbush," Jimmy insisted, — "my uncle's goin' to drive down to the farm in the buckboard, an' we can get a ride with him, part way."

The question was put and carried without dissent, and the meeting stood adjourned.

## CHAPTER XIX

### ENTERTAINING ALICE

It was sprung on me without any pretence of a fair warning. Rob Currier, Ed Mason, and I had just rounded up a herd of buffaloes in the back of my garden, and we were busily engaged in lassoing separate members of the herd before they should slip through the fence into Mr. Tilton's vegetable patch. Once let them get there and it would be well-nigh impossible, among the lettuce and tomatoes, ever to reduce them to submission. Your buffalo is tractable and decent on even turf, but when he gets all mixed up with vegetables he becomes a perfect nuisance.

At the most exciting moment came a voice which had to be obeyed:—

“Sam !”

I ran, with my lasso in my hand, toward the house.

“Sam, go right upstairs and wash your hands and face, and brush your hair. Leave that old rope outside, — don’t bring it in here.”

That old rope !

Before I could make any inquiries, any explanations, I was hustled in, rushed upstairs, forcibly cleaned, lacerated with Dr. Kaltblut’s steel-pronged tomahawk (falsely called a hair-brush) and shoved downstairs again.

Here, I was dragged — a whited sepulchre — into a front room, where sat a lady, — a perfect stranger to me, and *a little girl*.

Toward the smaller and younger of these beings I was propelled.

“Here, Alice, this is Sam. Sam, this is little Alice Remick, who is going to be

your neighbor. I want you to be nice to her, and play with her this afternoon, and entertain her."

The concentrated perfidy of it! The unmitigated baseness! What more could Lucrezia Borgia have contrived?

Entertain her! Entertain this spindle-legged, pig-tailed creature who was sucking her thumb in lively embarrassment! Was I a dancing bear, or a mountebank, that I should be called upon to furnish amusement to *this*? Reflect that I had been called from high and mighty pursuits, that I was roping a gigantic and ferocious bull buffalo at the very moment when I was interrupted. That even as I stood there in the house the blackberry bushes were in danger from the rest of the herd, since the band of hunters had been deprived of one unerring hand and bold spirit. And all for the purpose of "entertaining" this hopeless product of civilization!

There was just one thing to do, and that was to bolt out of the room without an instant's delay.

I did so, but only succeeded in getting to the front door. This was locked, and in a second I had been recaptured. Then I was taken back to the room, where I had to stand the humiliation of hearing myself apologized for, in the presence of the little girl.

"Why, I do not know what made him behave so! I never knew him to do anything like it before. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Sam? Now, you must be polite to Alice, for she is a stranger. You'll do it to please me, Sam."

This was certainly playing it pretty low down. I had been trapped by a combination of force and guile, and now an appeal was uttered in terms that made a refusal difficult, as well as useless.

But what could I do with her? I had

no experience with them, except very seldom, and then in groups. To have a lone specimen like this thrust upon me was simply preposterous. Many of the boys had sisters, — both Rob and Ed were provided for in that respect. Very little profit, that I could see, did they ever get out of them. When the sisters were older, they were simply additions to the household tyrants who thronged in every family. They assumed an air of authority; gave orders, administered punishments, and reported to higher quarters what they were pleased to consider serious misdemeanors.

As for the younger ones, — they were so many millstones about the neck. Sadie Currier and Louise Mason were always tagging on behind, spying here and interfering there. The two Kittredges, — Susy and Minnie, — were worse than all the rest. Minnie's spotless behavior,



clean hands, correct pronunciation, and generally immaculate existence was a continual reproach to all of us who were merely human. Susy's tongue was never quiet, and she divided her time between chanting her own merits, and predicting woe for the rest of the world.

So it was with a not altogether unprejudiced eye that I gazed on this small interloper, and wondered what I had done that I should be treated like this. Doubtless she reciprocated the feeling heartily, but I had no means of knowing that. I could not go forth again to the buffalo hunt, carrying this bit of impedimenta with me. When I even suggested taking her outdoors, a veto was pronounced promptly.

Alice was dressed too nicely to go and play outdoors.

Dressed indeed she was, — starched and cleaned and combed distressingly.

"Perhaps Alice would like to see some of the things in your playroom, Sam, — why don't you take her out there?"

I had expected it. There only remained this final blow, and I knew it would fall. Admit this girl to my inner sanctum, — oh, well, the world was turned upside down this afternoon. What had to be, had to be, and there was an end to it.

"Come on!" I said, in a tone that mingled resignation and gruffness.

Alice did not evince any great amount of eagerness to follow me. Instead, she hung back, — exactly like a girl! Here was I, putting myself out to be pleasant and courteous, giving up my afternoon, in fact, for her amusement, and at my very first invitation she pretended reluctance.

Her mother urged her to accompany me, however, and pretty soon we reached my especial room.

"Do you like polliwogs?" I demanded, walking toward a glass jar in which several hundred of them swam about like animated quotation marks.

"Ugh! I hate 'em! Nathty squiggly things!" and she turned away abruptly.

Here was a nice beginning for you! My prized polliwogs, gathered at no small trouble, and already beginning to show the most interesting signs of frogishness, were dismissed as "nathty squiggly things!"

But I let the matter pass. I was determined to be polite, — polite and patient. I picked up a little box, covered with wire.

"Here is my snake box, — I've only got two now, — one green one and —"

I had no time to finish about the red one, nor to exhibit the snakes themselves. They were really the most harmless

little fellows in the world, — neither of them over five inches long. One I had found under a fallen headstone in the old burying-ground, and the other I had obtained by swapping with Ed Mason, — giving a sinker, two fish-hooks, a turtle, and a piece of rock candy in exchange.

But as soon as I mentioned the snakes, this perverse female backed across the room, her eyes closed, and both ears stopped with the tips of her forefingers, as if she thought my pets might utter some fearful screech.

“Oh, *snakth!* Take 'em away! I don't want to thee 'em! I hate 'em. What do you have such *nathty* petth for? Why don't you have nice ones?”

This was insulting. I was far fonder of my pets than of this fussy little person. Moreover, I was doing my best to amuse her.

"I do have nice ones," I rejoined indignantly, "an' I've got a dog, an' a white rabbit, an' two guinea pigs out in the barn. Do you like any of those?"

"Not very much."

She was hopeless, — simply hopeless. Under the circumstances it seemed hardly worth while to show her my June bugs, — although I had seven or eight which I had caught the night before. They were of the superior golden-yellow variety, too, — not the common brown ones.

"Haven't you any pets?" I asked.

"Yeth; I've got a kitten."

A kitten! I might have known as much. Ordinarily I would have refrained from any comment on kittens, but now, "Kittens are no good," I announced.

"They are *too*; they're lovely."

"No, they ain't, either, — they grow up into cats."

"Catth are nice."

"They catch birds, and torture 'em,"  
I remarked.

The little girl began to whimper.

I couldn't stand blubbering, at any rate. I must do something to stop that. What would appeal to her? There was the engine which would puff out steam when you lighted the lamp under its boiler. Instinctively I knew she would not care for that.

There was my bag of marbles, — including two "alleys," one of which had some beautiful substance that looked like checkerberry candy inside it.

I brought the marbles forward; she remained passive.

My railroad punch (which had once belonged to a real conductor on a train) — she might look at that. Nay, more, she might punch fascinating little holes in a piece of paper with it. In my

determination to be hospitable I would leave no stone unturned.

But she laid the punch down, and wandered listlessly toward the door, her thumb once more in her mouth.

There was nothing for it but to play my highest trump; she should see my white mice! They were prosperous and interesting, and there were five new ones since last week.

"Come here," I said, and I took her to their box. We looked down into their home, and as we did so, an elder mouse poked his head above the straw, and sniffed the air curiously, his little eyes twinkling, and his whiskers quivering with excitement.

Miss Alice uttered a loud squeal, and dashed out of the room. I could hear her all along the passage:—

"Oh, mamma, mamma, — a *mouth!*  
a *mouth!*"

Well, I gave it up. I had made every effort, — there was no pleasing the creature. My conscience was clear at all events, — and that was the principal thing.



## CHAPTER XX

### WHILE THE EVIL DAYS COME NOT

SEPTEMBER was horribly near. And worse, — there was coming that 5th day of September when a certain bell should ring again, and we trudge up Elm Street, fidgeting uneasily about in our new “fall” clothes.

The spectre of that man, that arithmetic-man, whose name during the days of vacation it were almost profanation to speak, arose before us with a hateful leer.

The nights and mornings had grown cooler, and where daisies and buttercups had blossomed at the roadside, the golden-rod and frost-flowers had it all their own way.

But one last adventure we must have, one last protest in the name of liberty. And so we organized, on the third day of September, an extensive expedition for the morrow, and I went to spend the night with Ed Mason, to be ready to make an early start.

I fell asleep, wondering if we might not discover some unknown countries during the next day. When I woke, a small, dim figure stood beside me, repeating the words, "It's half-past four."

It took me a number of seconds to comprehend their meaning, and to recognize their speaker. Then I knew, of course, — this was the hour of rising for the great expedition into the backwoods, and here was Ed Mason telling me of that fact.

By day, Mason stalked the earth, compelling and terrible, in all the majesty of nine years. The ground trembled beneath his feet, and none looked upon

him without reverence. With his own strong right arm he had slain the muskrat in its lair, and he had explored the fastnesses of "Second Woods," — which, as everybody knew, were at least three-quarters of a mile beyond "First Woods."

But now, in the chilly twilight before dawn, and clad in a single white garment, which hung from his shoulders angelwise, there lacked something of the awe which usually invested the Terror of the Neighborhood.

Moreover, the nearly complete darkness which surrounded us, and eight solid hours of sleep from which I had just emerged, tended to make me slow of understanding. Only the afternoon before, and the world which had stretched beyond the borders of the town lay at our feet, awaiting our conquering footsteps. Now, the world seemed not only cold and dark, but immeasurably vast,

and we no longer a pair of relentless Columbus. Rather small, in fact, we seemed, and not wholly equipped to tame the jungle, and bring the desert to acknowledge its masters.

However, I said nothing of this to Ed Mason, but arose and dressed. He was making ready in another room, and in a few minutes we tiptoed down the stairs. At five o'clock we were to meet other bold travellers at a rendezvous near the frog pond, and there was no time to be lost.

Luncheons, a day's supply of food, had been prepared and put in boxes the evening before.

With these under our arms, we hurried out into the faint light and through the side yard, our spirits and our clothes a trifle dampened on the way, by means of a glass of water thoughtfully poured upon us from a window by Ed's sister

Florence. This attention was by way of reciprocating our act of the previous week, when we had locked her for a while in the hen-house, — a bit of humor which we had long ago forgotten, but which, it appeared, she still held in lively recollection.

As we approached the pond, three other personages came into sight. These were Rob Currier, Jimmy Toppan, and Joe Carter. Charley Carter had been one of the organizers of the expedition, but a too intimate association with Mr. Hawkins's Bartlett pear tree and the fruit thereof, late on the previous afternoon, had rendered his absence unavoidable.

From his elder brother we gathered that Charles had passed the darkling hours in a manner not altogether agreeable, and that his parents, and even Dr. Macey, had been in consultation over

the matter. Indeed, it was a narrow escape for Joe that he was not made to suffer vicarious punishment, and be kept at home on this day of days, but luckily he had been able to prove an alibi.

Peter Bailey would not accompany us.

This was not on account of illness, but, as we had all been made aware, because he disapproved of our methods. It was absurd, he had pointed out, to go on such an excursion without a compass. The military instinct which already made Peter regard himself as a future ornament to the United States Army, and which is doubtless of supreme value to him to-day in a stock-broker's office, — this instinct demanded a compass in order to find our path through the wilds.

None of us had a compass, and Peter's was broken, and could not be replaced until his birthday, — six months hence.

We must either postpone our trip for six months or go without Peter. He would not trust himself so far from civilization unless at any moment he might satisfy his passion for knowing where lay the north.

Some little delicacy made us refrain from suggesting that at the farthest point which we should probably reach, the spires of most of the churches in town would undoubtedly be visible, and that we might take our bearings from these.

Jimmy Toppan, then, as now, a navigator of deep seas, was one on whom the compass argument had made a profound impression. He described an ingenious but complicated recipe (which had once proved the salvation of certain mariners) whereby the hands of a watch, — if directed toward the sun, or away from the sun, I forget which, at noon, might serve in place of the magnetic needle.

But, as Rob Currier observed, we might be hopelessly lost long before noon, and Ed Mason supplemented this gloomy prophecy by recalling the fact that Peter Bailey's Waterbury watch (the only time-piece amongst us) was never going, through Peter's constant neglect to spend the fifteen minutes necessary to wind it up.

The plan for the day had nearly fallen through, but we finally decided to take our lives in our hands, and go without a compass. Peter, after treating us to a few sarcasms on our unscientific venture, refused absolutely to have anything to do with the trip. So there were but five of us who set out at last.

On one thing we were determined. This was an all-day expedition. The necessary amount of exploration, of hunting and fishing, could not be accomplished in a few hours. We carried food



for three full meals, and our families had been warned that they must get along without us until night began to gather in.

Ed Mason had a light air-rifle, and Joe Carter, by virtue of his seniority and experience (he was thirteen that week) carried a small but pernicious revolver. The rest of us had fishing-poles and lines, and I was further equipped with a burning-glass, — without which no one should venture into the wilderness, where matches may fail, and camp-fires have to be kindled.

We had not gone far when the suitability of breakfast occurred to us. We paused by the road, — not far from the brickyard (where Ed Mason had once beaten off an attack by tramps) and ate one third of our provision.

Rob Currier's box proved to contain, among other things, a couple of hard-boiled eggs, and to find a third part of

two eggs was not only puzzling, but unpleasantly reminiscent of Mr. Colburn's Arithmetic, — a book which we did not care to have accompany us, even in spirit.

Rob solved the problem by eating both eggs then and there.

A short walk brought us to a spot on Little River where the fishing was good, and here Jimmy Toppan and I promptly unlimbered our rods. Ed Mason wandered across the meadow to look for a legendary owl, which he claimed once to have seen in a tree near the centre of the meadow.

An owl-haunted tree it certainly looked, but at that hour of the day there was little surprise that Ed saw nothing of him. The hunter soon returned to the river bank, where Jimmy and I were pulling in hornpouts at a great rate.

The others, scornful of hornpouts, had departed to a small pool, farther up the

river, where nobler game was reported. Before the end of an hour they returned, bringing two very small and skinny pickerel. Now your pickerel, be he ever so meagre, is of course a nobler fish than your hornpout, and there is more glory in his capture. So Joe Carter and Rob were fain to look with loathing upon the dozen fat hornpouts which lay on the grass, and to consider that Jimmy and I had spent our time in but a trifling fashion.

Not content with vaunting the superiority of their two dusty pickerel, they reduced us to deeper humiliation by recounting their adventures. Joe Carter had lost bait, hook, and float from his fishing tackle, through the agency of the enormous turtle who had lived for many a year under the bridge at the head of the pool, and Rob Currier had fallen into the water and come out wet to the

knees. So it was evident that there was nothing for Jimmy and me but to hide our diminished heads.

We said little, but suggested that as the morning was apparently far advanced, it would be well to have a swim and our midday meal. By the railroad track, — a short cut, we reached the swimming place, Four Rocks. It was probably the poorest swimming pool ever prescribed by an iron tradition. Passing trains made it necessary modestly to seek deeper water, and grazing cows threatened to devour our clothes; but here, and at no other place, did every boy learn to swim.

Tradition is a tyrant; during the believing years it is the worst of despots.

In a few minutes we were all in the water, — all except Rob Currier, who, under threat of dire punishment, had been eternally charged by his mother to keep

out of the water until he was a complete master of the art of swimming.

As he had not yet learned on land, he sat on the bank, threw pebbles at the cows, and from time to time remarked monotonously: "Oh, come on!"

The process of dressing was slow, — the use of towels, or any serious attempt to dry oneself, being tabooed as a sign of the most degrading effeminacy. When we were ready to depart, the position of the sun, and a hollow sensation in our interiors, showed beyond question that we must once more draw upon our commissariat.

Guided by three gaunt poplars, we advanced to the Devil's Den, — an ancient limestone quarry, which had some of the appearance, and many of the advantages, of a natural cave. Curious mineral substances were found there, — asbestos might be dug from the rock

with a jack-knife, and green veins of serpentine decorated the side of the cliff.

It was a recognized spot for picnics, and we should have scarcely thought of eating our principal meal anywhere else. In the deepest part of the cleft was an unwholesome-looking puddle into which dripped the moisture from the roof of the cave. It was rather gloomy, and made visitors lower their voices a little, until they were in the sunlight once more.

We built a fire, — for what purpose it would be difficult to say, as sandwiches, cake, and fruit do not need a great deal of cooking, and the fish which we had captured had been left with old Mr. Harris, the railroad-crossing tender, to be claimed on our return trip.

It was pleasant, although a trifle hot and smoky on a warm day, to sit around

a fire and refresh our wearied frames with food. Joe Carter had a clay pipe, and after he had eaten, tried the experiment of smoking dried leaves in it. He coughed a good deal, and did not seem to derive that joy from the process which we had all heard arose from the use of a pipe.

After a little time we set out once more, climbed to the top of Devil's Pulpit, and then took the road toward the Devil's Basin. In that region, the Devil seems to have had a large interest in the scenery. The road is of the pleasantest, however. Here, before the snow has hardly left the woods, the spring "peepers" sing insistently from a little bog, while, a few weeks later, the gentle blossoms of the hepatica emerge shyly from the dead leaves, and the anemone springs up on the hillside.

Now, although the tide of summer

ebbed, the woods were crammed with things of interest. We investigated the Basin, — another deserted quarry. We explored the edges of the bog, and stalked a flock of crows who had gathered in the top of an oak. The afternoon passed at first pleasantly, but finally with some tedium, — the day seemed interminably long. Yet we grudged every moment, for we realized that the hours of vacation were numbered.

We rambled about till we became aware that we were very tired, that the day was waning, and that three or four long miles lay between us and home.

So we hurried through our suppers, and started on the return trip. Joe Carter walked a little in advance, calling out from time to time:—

“You fellers better hurry up, unless you want to camp all night in the woods.”

Then he would casually take out his



revolver and look mysteriously toward the deep undergrowth on each side of the road, as if to signify that he could not hold himself responsible for what manner of thing might beset us after the powers of darkness should be exalted.

We did not want to camp all night in the woods (Ed Mason and I had not forgotten a certain experience!) and we hastened our steps.

When we reached Mr. Harris's little shanty, it was closed and locked, and the old gentleman had gone, — whither we knew not. Our fish he had kindly preserved for us in a pail of water. We gathered them up, and hurried on.

We debated what was the exact hour, and both Ed Mason and Rob Currier thought that sunset was close upon us. Ed remarked that he had seen one or two bats fluttering about, as we came through the woods. Evidently the

creatures of the night were beginning to make their appearance.

Tired we were, — we knew that, — and a little moody at the thought of approaching school. I had a small, sharp pebble in my shoe, which made walking very painful. So I had to delay the party until I could rid myself of it.

Finally we left the railroad track, and started on the home stretch over the old turnpike. We felt more at ease now, since houses were in plain sight, and the town distant only a matter of thirty minutes' walking.

Here we met a man driving a sorrel horse in a wagon.

Joe Carter hailed him.

"Say, mister, do you know what time it is?" asked Joe.

The man pulled up the horse, and took a watch out of his pocket. He looked

at the dial, and then held the watch to his ear.

"Well," he remarked leisurely, "guess my watch has stopped again. But I can tell yer pretty close. It was quarter to nine when I came by Moulton's, an' that wa'n't more'n fifteen minutes ago. It's 'bout nine o'clock now, — I guess you young fellers better be gettin' home pretty quick, or you won't get no breakfast!"

*"What?"*

We all shouted at once.

The man looked at us bewildered.

"What are you talkin' about?" Joe Carter asked him; "quarter of nine — in the evening?"

"Evening?" said the man; "you crazy? No, — quarter to nine in the mornin', of course. What do you — oh! I see! Been spendin' the night in the woods, an' got lost, ain't yer?"

"No," Joe replied; "we been out all day, — we started 'fore daylight this morning, an' we [thought it was night."

The man still stared, but gradually he began to grasp the situation. His mouth slowly opened, a grin began to creep round to his ears, and he cackled. Cackled offensively and long.

We could not stand that, and we hurried along the road. The man stood up in his wagon, looking after us, and still uttering that idiotic cackle.

"Well, we're a lot of numb-heads," remarked Rob Currier.

Apparently we all agreed, but no one said so. We stubbed along in the dust, silent and ashamed. The fiasco had taken the life out of us. We did not want to go back to the woods and we did not want to return home. The jeers that might greet us there would be worse

than the laughter of the man in the wagon.

Out for an all-day expedition on the last day before school opened, out for a grand exploration of the wild country, — and we had eaten all three of our meals and come home at nine o'clock in the morning! What were these bats and night-birds that we had seen? Where was the sunset and all the rest of it? This last day of vacation to be spoiled —

Suddenly Joe Carter stopped in the middle of the road.

His mouth opened, and then a grin spread over his face.

“By Jings!” he shouted.

We stopped and gazed at him.

Then he began to jump about excitedly on one leg.

“Don’t you see?” he cried.

“What? See what?”

“Why, don’t you see? What do we care for that old hayseed in the wagon? Or for any one? We’ve still got a whole day of vacation left!”



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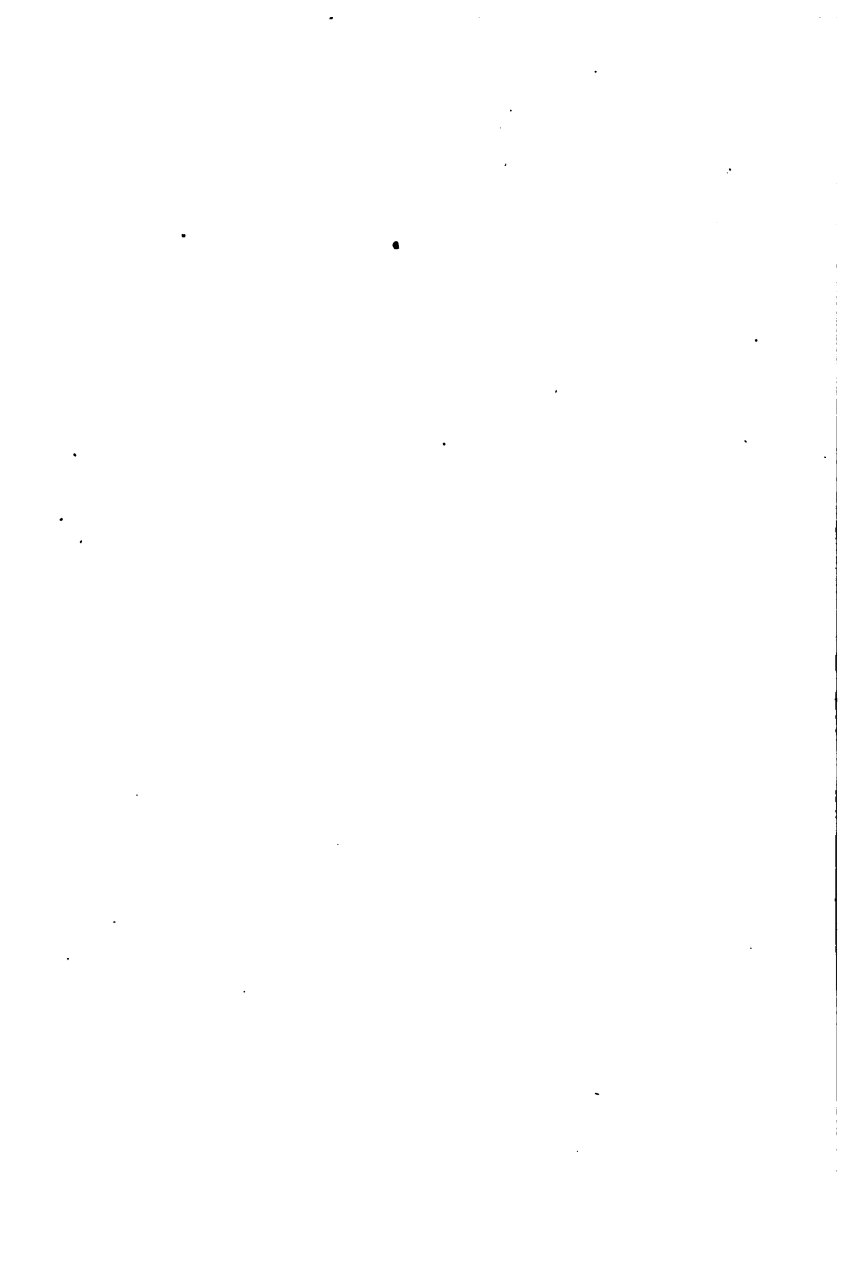
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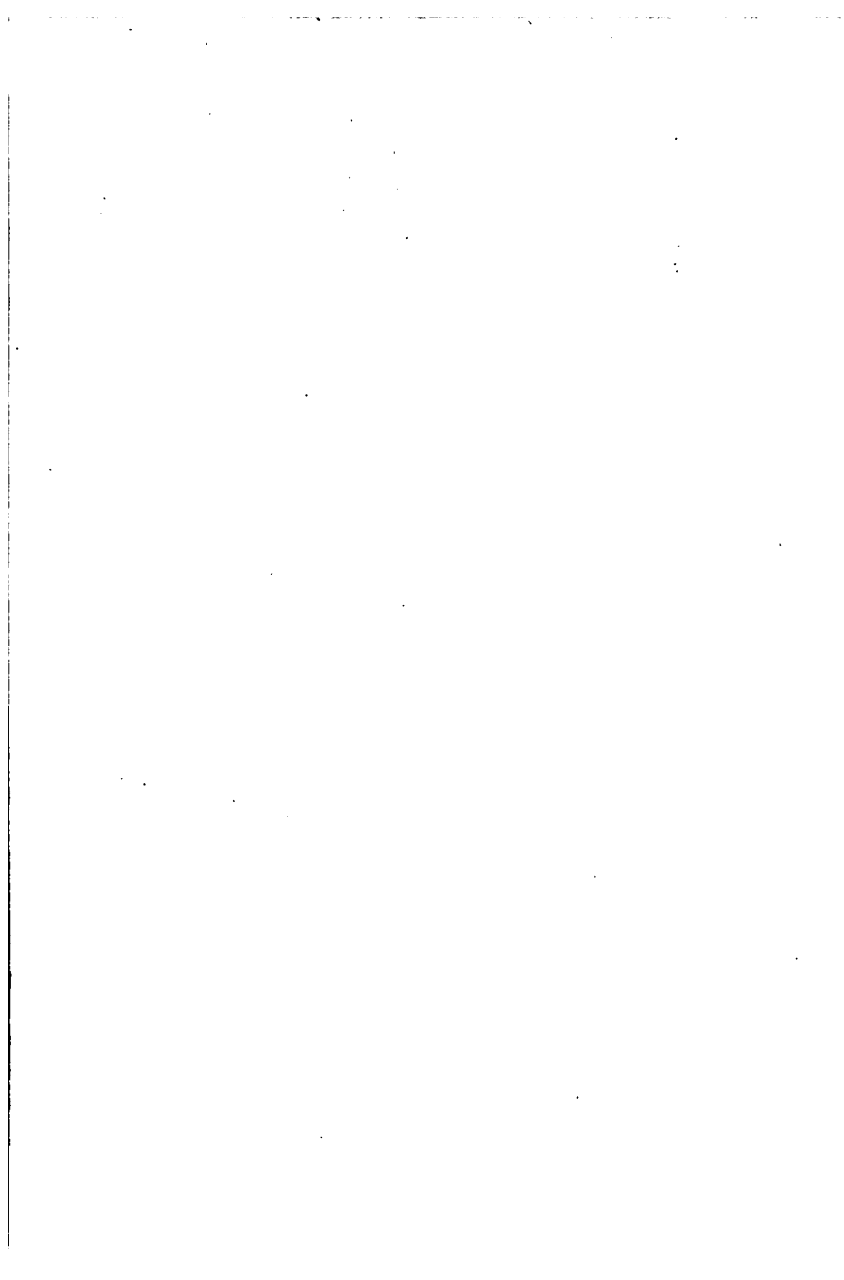
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